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# BEARERS OF THE BURDEN



WORKS BY  
MAJOR W. P. DRURY

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*TWO SHILLINGS NET EACH*

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MEN AT ARMS

THE TADPOLE OF AN ARCHANGEL, THE  
PETRIFIED EYE, AND OTHER STORIES

THE PERADVENTURES OF PRIVATE PAGETT  
BEARERS OF THE BURDEN

THE PASSING OF THE FLAGSHIP

THE SHADOW ON THE QUARTER-DECK

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*THREE SHILLINGS AND SIXPENCE*

---

LONG BOW AND BROAD ARROW

---

LONDON: CHAPMAN AND HALL, LTD.

# Bearers of the Burden

BEING STORIES OF LAND AND SEA

BY

MAJOR W. P. DRURY

ROYAL MARINE LIGHT INFANTRY

(RETIRED)

*NEW AND CHEAPER EDITION*

LONDON

CHAPMAN AND HALL, LD.

1911

. Per Mare, Per Terram.

*The Motto of the Royal Marines.*

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**'PARTED BRASSRAGS'**

**AN INTERNATIONAL INTERLUDE**



## ‘PARTED BRASSRAGS’

WHEN “Pincher” Martin, Ordinary, and “Nobby” Clarke, A.B., desire to prove the brotherly love and trust with which each inspires the other, it is their pleasing custom to keep their brasswork cleaning rags in a joint ragbag. But should relations thereafter become strained between them, the bag owner casts forth upon the deck, as though they were infected, his sometime brother’s rags ; and with the parting of the brassrags hostilities begin. I have even known a case of parted brassrags to set a whole ship’s company by the ears. This is a tale of parted brassrags that came within an ace of setting Europe in a blaze.

The mind of the tar is as a sealed book to the multitude. Who shall explain why the crews of two ships in a squadron should conceive so deadly a hatred for each other as to preclude the granting of leave to both of them on the same afternoon? Yet this is not more unknown than two ships’ companies inviting each other to lower-deck



suppers and sing-songs, and monopolising water-side taverns to the exclusion of the rest of their fleet mates. On other—though rarer—occasions a ship will foregather and hobnob with one of an alien squadron; and this is what happened out in the gorgeous East with the second-class cruiser *Contemptuous* and his Imperial Majesty's first-class battleship *Dropkickoff*.

Why the tars of such an ill-assorted pair of vessels and belonging to two great rival powers should fraternise in this fashion I know not. Neither do I know what prompted the pet bulldog and bear in my last ship to bask in the sun together, and drink from a common dish. Nevertheless, it was so: and from the attitude of the rival powers in the streets of the gorgeous East the Peace Society would have been justified in auguring that arbitration would shortly be the mode. With their arms round the necks of their dear brothers, the men of the *Dropkickoff* drank unfamiliar beer, and chorused lustily what Pierre Loti calls our "dismal God-save"; and, though the dear brothers liked it little enough, they doubtless consoled themselves with the reflection that it is a sweet and glorious thing to suffer for one's country.

The officers also suffered—struggling with French irregular verbs and idioms, and drinking sweet brandy man for man, until the seams of their skulls at breakfast time appeared to open and close like the seams of a labouring ship. As it became a point of honour at these international banquets to see the

entire officers of one nation or the other under the table, it is impossible to say where things would have ended had not an unexpected crisis suddenly arisen. The *Contemptuous* was ordered to a distant part of the station, and the officers of the *Dropkickoff* invited their dear friends to a farewell dinner.

It is not my design to describe in detail this Bacchanalian send-off. The entire stock of coloured bottles from the plate-glass backing of an hotel bar appeared to have been transferred bodily in honour of the occasion to the *Dropkickoff's* wardroom table. Besides the ordinary gamut of dinner wines, an octave of Bessarabian vintage of great antiquity and mellowness had been broached in the battleship's nethermost hold. Bottled Bass went round with the dessert, in accordance with the inexplicable but well-known custom of the English; while the sweet brandy of the hosts' nation ran through the entire dinner like a melody half drowned in a too elaborate orchestration.

But it was not until the cloth had been removed that the serious business of the evening began. Then the picturesque chaplain, in flowing locks and cassock, caused to be set in a soup tureen a tapering sugarloaf, over which he poured great store of rum; and setting fire thereto, he presently ladled the burnt sweetness into cups. Beginning with the respective healths of their Britannic and Imperial Majesties, these loyal subjects conscientiously worked through the two most prolific reigning families of Europe; and few indeed were the stayers who were in at the toast of

the last-born great-great-grandchild. Finally one of the guests, in a burst of enthusiasm and with occasional lapses of coherence, expressed a hope that the present company would never part brassrags. To which his neighbour, lifting his cup, replied in true English fashion, "Gentlemen, charge your glasses. May our dear brothers and we nevere part—how say you? Yes—brassrag!"

The following morning betimes the *Dropkickoff's* band was on deck, braying the "God-save" for all it was worth. For a British cruiser was leaving the anchorage, and the brotherly love existing between two great European powers must needs be proclaimed to the gorgeous East with a flourish of trumpets.

Now, all the while this pretty little idyll was being enacted in the remote Oriental harbour, ominous clouds were banking up on the Western horizon. Entirely unsuspected by the distant, isolated warships, relations had become dangerously strained between their respective Governments. The bear and the bulldog were growling and showing their teeth at each other now across their common water-dish, and it needed but the crack of a rifle to set the whole of the European menagerie at each other's throats. So near a thing was it indeed—and this is a matter of history—that the twitching forefinger was actually crooked round the trigger.

At noon the *Contemptuous* passed afar off the small local steamer that ran the mails to the outermost Orient from the rim of civilisation, whereat both wardroom and lower deck swore, being sick with

longing for news. At midnight, nevertheless, they swore still louder. Grit, without which man is of little worth, is distinctly undesirable in a thrust bearing; and it was at twelve o'clock that the chief engineer whistled up to the bridge and reported the disarrangement of his machinery from this cause. As the necessary overhaul was impossible at sea, there was nothing for it but to return to port; so, her helm being put hard over, the *Contemptuous* gingerly crept back again in her own scarce obliterated wake.

On the third morning after her untoward start the British cruiser, making the harbour mouth once more, opened out her "chummy ship," the *Dropkickoff*, as she lay at single anchor within. But what a changed *Dropkickoff* was this which loomed slowly into view! Stanchions, rails, and davits lay prone upon her decks; every deadlight was shipped; nets drooped forlornly in the water round about her hull; and not a soul was visible throughout the great length and beam of her. A landsman might well have mistaken her for an abandoned wreck. But the last joined boy on board the *Contemptuous* knew well enough that his Imperial Majesty's first-class battleship *Dropkickoff* was cleared for action, and that it was no mere forenoon drill this time.

From the top of the chart-house, perched high on the cruiser's fore bridge, the English captain watched the great ship through his glass. She literally bristled with guns, and every one of them, from the giants that craned their long muzzles through the turret ports to the pigmy "decimal four five" in the

fighting top, was trained on the crippled *Contemptuous*. None realised better than the latter's officers and crew that a broadside at short range from such a leviathan would blow their own vessel clean out of the water. Nevertheless, they went about their several duties with as much swagger and unconcern as they could muster, conscious that the glasses of their dear friends were upon them, and resolved to show that the ship did not belie her name. Not a gun was cast loose, not a magazine opened ; but, as the cruiser was about to pass the battleship to pick up her former billet in the anchorage, the captain sent for the first lieutenant.

"Why the devil we've parted brassrags I can't make out," he began, "but it's evident that our dear friends have got the drop on us, and that they mean business. If they fire, I shall be the first man killed and you will take command ; and my last order to you is to ram her."

"Aye, aye, sir!" said number one, saluting, and he leisurely descended again to the fo'c'sle to superintend the bringing of the ship to an anchor.

Silently the wicked-looking muzzles of the battleship's guns followed the cruiser from stem to stern as she passed dead slow before them. Behind stooped invisible men with hungry eyes along the sights and twitching fingers on lanyard, trigger, and electric key. It is no exaggeration to say that a sneeze during those few moments might have started the European war of our half-century. In any case, the *Contemptuous* would most assuredly have been wiped off the

British Navy list, and the tars, fully recognising this, whistled merrily over their work—for the benefit of their dear friends—like a thicketful of blackbirds in spring. Nevertheless, so great was the tension that, when the port anchor splashed overboard at the first lieutenant's order “Let go!” the entire ship's company ducked their heads, and stopped whistling with the finish of a trained chorus.

Then the British post-captain arose in his wrath, and, ordering his galley to be manned, caused himself to be pulled on board the *Dropkickoff*. Nothing could have exceeded the punctiliousness of his reception, not a detail was omitted from the impressive naval ceremonial proper to such occasions. The tailor-made figures of the fore'gn captain and his officers clicked their heels and saluted with the grace of marionettes; the bluejacket guard slapped their rifle slings, as they presented arms, with a noise like the flapping of scrubbed hammocks; the bosun's mate piped his shrillest, and the bugler all but blared himself into an apoplectic fit. And to this tom-tom beating of Western civilisation the host bowed his visitor down the after ladder and into the sentry-guarded cabin.

The visitor lost no time in coming to the point. With the proverbial bluntness of the British seaman he demanded an explanation of the affront placed upon his sovereign and his country's flag. “For I have yet to learn,” said he, “that international etiquette permits a man-of-war to train her guns in peace time upon a ship of another power.”

"Mais oui, cher capitaine," admitted the other, "such action would assuredly in peace time be most reprehensible. But, after the news that comes from arriving in the paquebot of yesterday, who shall say that it *is* peace time? For I am desolated to read in the journals, cher ami, that since already two months your Government and mine have—have—how say you in your most charming idiom?—ah! yes, have parted brassrag."

"Yes, but hang it all!" protested the Englishman, "you don't know that war has actually been declared. Play the game, for God's sake! Train your guns off me, pipe down, and wait for the next mail, which is due in ten days' time. Then we can both start fair, don't you know?"

The *Dropkickoff's* captain turned the whites of his eyes to the beams overhead. "Eemposseeble," he returned emphatically. "What you suggest is—to employ the classic English of your Sir Gladstone—'all Johnnie up the orchard.' If at this crisis so ferreeble I were to give the ordare to train my cannons off your vessel-of-war, before I could say 'Goddam, Jacques Robinson!' they would be fired. Ah! yes, but it is too true. So agitated are my brave offisares and crew by this so deplorable intelligence in the journals, that I cannot even hold myself responsible for your distinguished life, my dear friend, while you remain on board this ship." And he nervously bowed his visitor towards the cabin door.

"Very well," returned the other, ascending the after ladder, "if that is how the land lies, disabled as

I am, I will weigh anchor and leave the port at once.”

The battleship's skipper appeared greatly relieved. “That would certainly seem to be the most diplomatic course,” he assented smilingly, as they stepped upon the quarter-deck.

“But, sir,” continued the Briton, pausing in the gangway, and well-nigh bursting with indignation, “although at present I cannot steam, by God! I can still fight. I shall have the honour to wait for you, monsieur, outside the harbour. Au revoir!”

The captain of the *Dropkickoff* shrugged his tailor-made shoulders, and bowed lower than before. Then the clicking of heels, the blaring, the piping, and the slapping of slings were repeated, and the English skipper, with his pennant flying in the bows of his galley and the white ensign trailing astern, pulled back to his own ship.

In half-an-hour the *Contemptuous*' port anchor was being fished and catted again, as that injured and sorely insulted cruiser crawled back to the harbour mouth; and, like the antennæ of some great water beetle, the pair of long guns in the *Dropkickoff's* fore turret twitched and oscillated, until her quondam chum had rounded the point and was out of sight.

For ten dreary days and nights the crippled cruiser rolled her nettings under in the heavy seas outside the harbour, while the battleship sullenly swung round her single anchor within. For ten times twenty-four feverish hours the respective ships' companies were continuously exercised at “general quarters,”



"fire and collision stations," "out torpedo nets," and—because you never know your luck—"abandon ship." In short, no stone was left unturned by either of these two dear friends (who had parted brassrags) to compass the destruction of the other; and on the morning of the eleventh day the smoke of the anxiously-looked-for mailboat blurred the horizon line.

As this small ocean tramp, tattered and blistered, yet pregnant with great news, presently lurched past the cruiser, the latter asked her in the commercial code the burning question of the hour; and, having taken in the reply, promptly followed her into the harbour. The post-captain, again perched high on the chart-house roof, and with his glass focussed upon his enemy, suddenly closed the instrument with a snap, and laughed till the tears ran down his face. Then the first lieutenant, navigator, and officer of the watch, who were just below him on the bridge, shut up their glasses and laughed too; while the ship's company, who had been peering with shaded eyes at the battleship, slapped their thighs with their horny hands and joined lustily in the mirth of their superiors. Her Britannic Majesty's second-class cruiser *Contemptuous* was really behaving herself like a penny steamboat full of home-coming trippers!

Now, the children of Neptune, like shoregoing babes, are readily moved to laughter; nor, it must be confessed, was the present situation entirely devoid of humour. For the *Dropkickoff*, little expecting this sudden reappearance of the English ship within the

harbour, was varying the monotony of “general quarters,” “fire and collision stations,” and “out torpedo nets,” by a morning at “abandon ship.” Every soul, from her captain to her cook’s mate, was in the long line of boats that lay half a mile distant from her defenceless hull! Like a brood of ducklings splashing to the shelter of their mother’s wing on the approach of danger, the deeply-laden boats floundered back to the ship at the advent of the *Contemptuous*: and it was this undignified haste of their dear friends which caused the British tars to smile. Two minutes’ play of their machine guns upon the panic-stricken procession, and the great first-class battleship would have fallen a resistless prize to the broken-down second-class cruiser.

“Poor luck, sir!” sighed the first lieutenant, thinking regretfully of the reply in the commercial code—“*Keep your hair on. Bruin has tucked in his claws.*”

“Damned poor luck!” said the captain viciously. “I’ve come to stay this time, anyhow. Stand by to let go *both* anchors!”

\* \* \* \* \*

The mooring of the ship being off their minds, the officers signalled to their dear friends of the *Droptick-off*—“Will you give us the honour of your company at dinner this evening?” To which the dear friends replied—“With much pleasure. Sorry that circumstances over which neither of us had control should have compelled us for ten desolating days to part brassrags.”



TERENCE OF TRINITY

WAR CORRESPONDENT



## TERENCE OF TRINITY

"Ye who believe in the beauty and strength of woman's devotion,  
List to a tale of love."—*Evangeline*.

TERENCE of Trinity, as his Christian name suggests, hailed from the Emerald Isle ; and, even for one of Erin's genial sons, he possessed a peculiarly irresistible charm of manner. His surname I never heard ; indeed, it is probable that, of all the men alive to-day with whom he once fore-gathered, they who know it could be numbered on the fingers of both hands. But so unbounded was his pride in "T. C. D.," where he had matriculated, and so often was the name of his beloved *alma mater* on his lips, that by degrees men came to substitute it for his patronymic. For the rest he was special correspondent of a great London daily ; and it was in the power of a woman to make of him a devil or a saint, according as her nature prompted her.

Until this tale of Terence and his love affair was

unfolded to me one moonlight night by a chance acquaintance in a Turkish café garden, I had never had occasion to consider seriously the *locale* of Trebizond. Indeed, I may as well confess that hitherto the name had only suggested a certain *opéra bouffe* which achieved some popularity in the early seventies. But now Trebizond became a place to hunt up in the atlas index, and, with forefingers set on lines of latitude and longitude respectively, to track to its lair on the map of Asiatic Turkey.

For 'twas at Trebizond, that ultra-oriental port on the shores of the Black Sea, that Terence first met Marie. To the student of human nature there is nothing surprising in the fact that a war-worn, storm-tossed cynic of seven-and-thirty should escape the wiles of a hundred experienced campaigners to kneel in the end at the feet of an unsophisticated girl of seventeen. This is what befell Terence; and Marie—of uncommon beauty even among her Circassian sisters—loved her impetuous wooer with all the intensity of a woman's first passion.

Of the early weeks of this summer idyll by the Black Sea the least said, perhaps, the soonest mended. And this was essentially a case for mending, not for talk. A contingency which a short year before, and in the matter of any other woman, would scarce have caused Terence a passing qualm, now filled him with the bitterest remorse. That Rip Van Winkle of a conscience which had slumbered twenty years was dazed with the shock of its awakening—a shock intensified by an unexpected order from the "daily"

to proceed post haste to far-away Bokhara beyond the Caspian. On one point, however, the culprit's mind was absolutely clear, and in order to carry that point into effect with the least possible delay he did not hesitate, though it was long past midnight, to seek out the humble lodging of his spiritual director in Trebizond.

The good father listened gravely to the old, old tale that has run into so many million editions.

"And now, how soon can you marry us?" came the climax, by no means the usual climax, as his reverence mentally noted.

What is your native place?" he asked.

"Ballytarbert on the Shannon."

"Then I can marry you, my son," came the gentle answer to the first question, "on the day you show me a certificate from the parish priest of Ballytarbert that you are not married already."

"But I am bound to leave to-morrow—this very afternoon—for Bokhara," protested Terence in dismay, "and Ballytarbert lies several thousand miles away in the opposite direction. How in the name of the blessed saints can I possibly get the certificate in time? Consider that before I can return to Trebizond—if, indeed, I ever do return—things will have happened. . . . Ah! father dear, will you not take my word, my oath if need be, that I am free to marry this woman whom I have wronged?"

But the priest remained obdurate.

"Then," cried Terence in his anger, "I must needs



turn heretic," and to a Protestant minister he accordingly betook himself.

Yet neither would this dour Presbyterian accede to the conscience-stricken sinner's petition. "Your own priest," he not unnaturally observed, "is doubtless justified in his refusal. It would not be becoming, nor indeed right, that I should marry one of his flock when he himself has already refused to do so."

Poor Terence was in despair. "If the Christian religion will not help me," he exclaimed with much bitterness, "I must perforce try the Mahomedan." And off he flung to the Hadji.

But here again lack of time proved an insurmountable obstacle, the Hadji refusing to consider the matter further until Terence should have been received with due ceremony into the fold of the Faithful.

Then, as a last resource, the distracted lover appealed to Cæsar in the person of the British consul. But, alas! so many formalities were necessary before a civil marriage could be concluded between a Circassian and an Irishman that officialdom proved as great a hindrance as priestcraft to this penitent seeker after virtue.

Foiled by priest and layman alike in his efforts to make the only possible atonement for his sin, Terence—the thoughtless, warm-hearted rake of but a few months back—was well-nigh driven out of his wits. And then, at the eleventh hour, came temporary succour for Marie from the very quarter that his experience of the world taught him to regard as the least promising; I mean, from woman herself. Aye!

and what to the cynic seemed stranger still, from the professedly religious woman. A humble sisterhood of mercy—of mercy in deed as well as in name—took the erring damsel under their protection ; and Terence set out for far-away Bokhara, if not with an easy conscience, at least with a mind at rest concerning the immediate welfare of the girl he loved so madly.

Of his long and very adventurous journey by caravan route along the shore of the Caspian, over the Hindu Kush, into the very heart of the Asiatic continent, I have no space to write. When hollow-eyed and sick at heart he eventually reached his goal, the unhappy "special" quickly realised that his troubles were but now begun, and that the trials of his journey were as bagatelle compared with those which awaited him in Bokhara.

For there he fell upon evil days indeed, and into the hands of the ungodly, who tortured him to make a tribal holiday. At the end of a month in this unspeakable hell his own Marie would not have known him ; at the end of two I doubt if the mother who bore him would. Nevertheless, such was the magnetism of his sunny Celtic nature, so undaunted his bearing under the most atrocious pain, that even these hairy demons of darkest Asia were presently impelled to stay their bloody hands. And yet—Terence himself often said so afterwards—'twould have been better, perhaps, had they continued, and so an end. Marie would have been spared the reopening of a partially-healed wound, and he himself saved many years of physical and mental anguish. But out of his captors'

savage admiration for his powers of endurance there grew a respect for, and a doglike attachment to, this irresistible Irishman, which gradually ripened into a kind of hero worship. At length—such monkey tricks does Fortune play with her box of human puppets—there came a day when the grey-haired cripple of their own making found himself the chief of these fierce, black-bearded tribesmen.

Thus many years dragged on—years, indeed, of lurid incident and feverish adventure for the battered derelict, yet years always of weariness, often of pain, and latterly of intolerable home-sickness in addition. During these years only the faintest of rumours reached him—and those at long intervals—from the outside world; while no rumours whatever reached the outside world of Terence. As far as his former associates were concerned he was as completely out of sight (and mind) as though he were lying in Ballytarbert churchyard.

At first, 'tis true, his name would occasionally crop up in the smoking-room of some club or ocean liner, round a camp fire on the Rockies or the South African veldt, in a Japanese tea-house, or one of those strange backwaters of the earth into which men drift and mingle for a season before scattering again to the thirty-two points of the compass. Then some former comrade would idly speculate as to "how poor Terence went under," and another, between the whiffs of his pipe, would remark what "a damned good fellow" he had been. But these occasions grew rarer as time went on; for it is a melancholy thought—

albeit a wholesome to dwell upon—that, such is the stress of life, a very brief absence from our accustomed place suffices to blot out all recollection of even the most popular among us from the minds of his fellows.

Then arose the misunderstanding with St. Petersburg. The precise question at issue between this barbaric state and the Government of the Czar I know not, nor is it material to the story. But so strained did the situation presently become, it was deemed advisable in Bokhara to send an envoy to treat with the St. Petersburg Cabinet. And who so fitted to conduct a delicate diplomatic mission as the plausible, silver-tongued captive who had become their chief?

For St. Petersburg Terence accordingly departed. He was tricked out with the barbaric baubles proper to his exalted station, and was attended by a fitting retinue and escort. Once clear of Bokhara, however, that truly remarkable man disappeared as completely as though the earth had swallowed him up. How he contrived to shed the barbaric baubles and shake off retinue and escort alike passes my comprehension. Nevertheless he did so, and, fortunately for him, never again did the fierce Bokhara tribesmen look upon the face of the greatest chief they had ever had.

One summer evening, many months later, there tottered into Trebizond a hollow-cheeked, sunken-eyed scarecrow in a shirt of sack and a state of high fever. Being presently conveyed by good Samaritans to a neighbouring hospital, he straight-

way fell into a delirium, and raved of certain unspeakable torments as practised by a hellful of black-bearded demons. At first he was like to die from the violence of the disorder, but by almost imperceptible degrees the blessed medicine, combined with the devotion of the good sister who nursed him, prevailed. He still babbled unceasingly, 'tis true, but no longer of the abominations of human devils. The name of an angel—a fallen angel, as one gathered from his self-accusing mutterings—was henceforward ever on his lips, and the angel's name was Marie.

The first time he murmured the well-loved syllables the sister, who was patiently smoothing the tumbled bedclothes for the hundredth time within the hour, felt the blood surge into her face and neck with the violent thumping of her heart. The next moment she was as white as the linen beneath her hands. For a single instant she gazed wildly into the wasted, deeply-lined, almost toothless face of the seemingly old man before her. Then with a great cry of "Oh! my beloved, my beloved, what have they done to thee?" she fell upon her knees beside the pallet, and folding her strong young arms about the miserable wreck before her, she strained him passionately to her bosom.

\* \* \* \* \*

And so, in like fashion with the lovers in Longfellow's exquisite poem, these twain after many years were brought together again. Unlike Gabriel, however, the fever-racked wanderer of this story did not die in the arms of his grief-stricken love. Neverthe-

less, I think you will agree with me that of the two women Evangeline in the end was the happier.

As inch by inch a mother fights with death for her ailing first-born, so Marie coaxed back to her weakling such health and vigour as he could ever hope to attain. For, truth to tell, he would never be more than a limp skin-and-bone caricature of the splendidly-built man to whom she had surrendered herself body and soul one summer's evening in the past. Yet far beyond man's comprehension is the constancy of some women to their first love, even though he may have been the cause of their undoing: and Marie tended, and cherished, and wept over this pitiable scarecrow that had been brought back to her arms, as though he were still that ideal of manhood, the recollection of which had filled her heart day and night for so many waiting years.

With Terence, however, it was otherwise. He could not be but deeply moved by the passionate devotion of this lovely woman now at the zenith of her beauty. Yet he felt himself totally incapable of responding to this wonderful wealth of love that was being lavished upon him. So great had been his sufferings, so deeply had the iron entered into his soul, so utterly sick and weary of life was he, in short, that he had neither the inclination nor the power to renew the love passages of his lost manhood. The long-drawn-out bitterness of an earthly hell had rendered him completely callous to the joys of an earthly heaven.

Nevertheless, indifferent though he might be to his

own future, he was still deeply concerned for Marie's. Now that her lord was come back to her, battered and feeble, and in dire need of her womanly ministrations, Marie never dreamt of troubling her pretty head about their unorthodox relationship. But Terence's old yearning to comply with the conventionalities of civilisation returned to him with redoubled force, and again he sought out the good father to whom years before he had appealed in vain.

This time he entered the priest's humble lodging confident of success; for his first two acts of convalescence had been to write to the parish priest of Ballytarbert and to the editor of the great London daily, and to both letters he had now received replies. The one from Ireland testified to the wanderer's celibacy so far as his native parish was concerned. "Whether among the women in whose ears you have whispered, and whose fingers you have pressed in a hundred other nooks and corners of the world," wrote his reverence of Ballytarbert, who knew human nature, especially the susceptible Hibernian portion of it, if ever man did, "whether, I say, among them all there be one having a claim upon you, you yourself, my son, and the good God alone know." Nevertheless, the following day, in a tiny incense-smelling chapel by the sea, Terence and Marie were made man and wife.

Some little time before, while Terence still lay helpless on his bed, he had asked Marie a question. She had been sitting contentedly beside him, his hand in hers, all the afternoon, and for the best part

of an hour neither had spoken. Then he suddenly broke the long silence.

"Where is the child?" he asked.

She fell on her knees beside him, and buried her burning face in the pillow.

"With *le bon Dieu*," she murmured simply; "he was but a day old when He took him."

And Terence, caressingly passing his fingers through the beautiful hair which had fallen across his breast, heaved a great sigh of relief.

Now, however, he had made "an honest woman" of her.

And he—this graduate of Trinity, who knew society in half the capitals of the world, to whom few races on the globe were unfamiliar, and who was but newly come through the valley of the shadow of death from a terrestrial hell—smiled grimly as he thought of the cant phrase. As though it needed the mumbled Latin of priestcraft to make "an honest woman" of Marie! As though a swinging censer, a tinkling bell, a finger ring were essential to lend respectability to this dear angel who had loved him, alas! too well, who had been constant to his memory so many silent years, and who had taken him to her arms again, and tenderly cherished him when he had at length been cast up at her feet a derelict with all the manhood battered out of him. Terence laughed wildly, then cursed—the day he first came to Trebizond, the night he fell among the devils of Bokhara, the hour that saw his birth.

In the eyes of the world, then, Marie for the first



time this many a year was become an honest woman. His means enabled him to make ample provision for her during the rest of her life ; the child was dead. Wherefore nothing more remained but to break to her, as gently as might be, the contents of that second letter—the one from the great London daily—and this he did without further delay.

She had barely realised that he must leave her ere he was gone—gone, though happily she knew it not, never to return. For the proprietors of the paper, with formal congratulations on his safe return to civilisation, had offered him his former post of war correspondent, and hinted at the satisfaction it would afford them could he see his way to proceed immediately to the Soudan, where serious trouble was imminent. Wreck though he was, Terence eagerly seized this opportunity of escaping from an intolerable position. He could be nothing but a millstone round the neck of a young and lovely woman like Marie ; better far that he should cast himself into the great sea of surging, battling humanity. Even as he stood beside her before the little tinselled altar his acceptance of the post was flashing over the wires Londonwards. An hour later he had departed out of her life for ever.

\* \* \* \* \*

There is ample evidence that this unhappy man was with Hicks Pasha's army on the eve of its destruction. Upwards of 10,000 troops were engaged that fatal day, yet from out the hell of flame, and smoke, and gun din, of screams and hacking spear-

blades, three men only are known to have come with their lives. And Terence was not of the trio.

And yet,—and yet— Well, I for one cannot but think that, somewhere among the hidden places of the earth Terence of Trinity still lingers ; and that now and then in his sleep there comes to him the vision of a sweet woman gazing with tear-dimmed eyes and the heart-sickness born of long-deferred hope towards the western rim of the Black Sea.



THE HOME-COMING OF THE STRANGE  
CHILDREN



## THE HOME-COMING OF THE STRANGE CHILDREN

"Rid me, and deliver me out of the great waters, from the hand of strange children ; whose mouth speaketh vanity, and their right hand is a right hand of iniquity."

ON the table in Jannaway's quarters—Jannaway himself, subaltern of the sea regiment and unrepentant prodigal, was playing black pool at the mess—I found a Bible. My tobacco being low in the jar and dusty withal, I had been minded to plenish it neighbourly fashion from Jannaway's, and Jannaway's chief earthly solace stood by chance upon the Book. The latter opened readily midway the Psalms of David, where the verse set forth above was scored about with a thick blue pencil line.

Now, before the average British subaltern betakes himself to the underlining of jeremiads in Holy Writ, he must have endured many things worth the hearing. Wherefore, on Jannaway's return—which, by reason of the alluring nature of black pool, happened not till the night was far spent and I had consumed great

store of his Navy Cut—I confronted him with the blue-bordered text, and demanded the tale which hung thereby. At first Jannaway, my host, swore, and so far forgot himself as to suggest, bed; but presently, repenting him of his churlishness, he set upon the table vessels of whisky, and soda, and gin, and in fine, nervous prose, which I shall not attempt to reproduce, unfolded to me this matter of the home-coming. By the time the cock in the barrack stables and his naval rival at the coastguard station had begun their exasperating *tu quoque* repartee, I fully comprehended why that blue-pencilled prayer had lain continually for the space of a fortnight on the sorely-tried Jannaway's tongue-tip.

It appeared that Jannaway at the present moment was enjoying "the blessings of the land with the fruits of his labours" after three and a half years' exile in the Pacific squadron. He was enjoying them immensely, so said Jannaway, the "blessings" meaning, as far as he could see, unlimited war-game and drill, and the "fruits" a certificate of sobriety from his late skipper, rheumatism in the shoulder-blades, and a subpoena to attend early in the Michaelmas term at the court of Sir Francis Jeune. With the prodigal's business there, any more than with the previous business in British Columbia which necessitated it, I have no concern; but the tale of his journey from Esquimaux to London seemed, as I heard it, to be well worth the re-telling. If to the reader it should appear otherwise, then *mea*—not Jannaway's—*culpa*.

That promising youth having been ordered to rejoin the head-quarters of the sea regiment in England, the Admiral directed that he should conduct to this country a batch of invalids and time-expired men from the fleet. At five o'clock on a radiant June evening Jannaway smilingly watched the shepherding of his flock before the Royal Naval Hospital at Esquimault. At five o'clock on a rainy July evening twelve days later he gloomily contemplated from Waterloo platform the vanishing tail-lights of the train which contained the last of them. Nevertheless was Jannaway's prayer to be rid of the strange children answered in that hour, and the rest of the evening the prodigal spent at the "Empire."

Jannaway's personally-conducted party numbered about thirty, and comprised half the ratings in Her Majesty's naval service. Besides Jannaway himself, there were three officers, viz. a boatswain, a chief engineer, and a surgeon, who had medical care of the invalids as far as Montreal, whence he was to return to his ship. The chief engineer's diagnosis of his own case being diametrically opposed to that set forth on his medical history sheet, he was not on speaking terms with the surgeon: and during the journey across the continent he dwelt continuously and with much emphasis on the extreme gratification the parting from his medical attendant at Montreal would afford him. In the matter of the boatswain's conduct, however, they were both agreed—that subtle seaman having taken advantage of their final wrangle at Vancouver to secure for himself and Jannaway the



two best berths in the car. All three of them, on the other hand, secretly resented the youth of their temporary commanding officer, although, had they sat but an hour at his feet, they would have learned concerning the ways of men and women—especially women—much quaint and unprinted knowledge.

Jannaway's troubles began with the muster outside Esquimault Hospital. An open barouche and two large 'buses had been chartered for the hour's drive to Victoria, and a British Columbian crowd, composed in the main of respectable matrons and maids, had gathered to watch their departure. The hour had dwindled already to fifty minutes, and the Victorian steamer was advertised by her Yankee skipper to sail on the stroke of the bell, "D.V. or not." But a certain time-expired private of Marines had not yet turned up, and Jannaway, watch in hand, was tenderly inquiring after his lost sheep at the 'bus doors.

"Private Pagett o' the *Canarybird*!" echoed a bluejacket with that ship's name on his cap ribbon, "why, I see 'im last in the forenoon watch, an' 'e was under more sail—beggin' *your* pardon, Mister Jannaway, sir—than what even a Marine can properly carry! 'Ere 'e comes, look!"

So much sail had that frail vessel carried, indeed, that he was now on his beam ends, being borne in that position on the shoulders of four sympathetic shipmates. To fittingly celebrate their comrade's return to his native land and civilian life, it appeared that the *Canarybird's* detachment of Marines had insisted upon his drinking the midday grog ration of

the entire mess, with the result that Mr. Pagett had lain at a waterside pothouse, in a state of coma and with his head under a tap, the greater part of the afternoon. This ornament to his regiment having been packed from the public gaze in the straw of the nearer 'bus, and covered up with his kit-bag, arms, and accoutrements, Jannaway was on the point of giving the order to start. But attracted at that moment by a sudden stir and commotion among the womenfolk, his eye lighted upon another of his flock, and he swore very fervently instead.

On the steps of the second 'bus hung a struggling, shouting, more than half-naked bluejacket. His trousers already lay in the dust, and he was in the act of pulling his shirt and jumper over his head, when Jannaway charged across the road and shot him, by the force of the collision, into the fore end of the vehicle. This seemingly abandoned tar—it was explained to the scandalised ladies—was a harmless, if somewhat embarrassing, lunatic, invalided home to the Naval Asylum at Yarmouth. In the absorbing interest of Pagett's disgraceful arrival, this hitherto tractable patient had been for the moment forgotten. The general excitement had aroused his slumbering madness; and throughout the drive to Victoria, his head still muffled in the flannel shirt and the jumper, he unceasingly and with much bitterness demanded to be informed what an adjective bathing-machine was for if not to undress in!

Well did Jannaway know that, given a volatile steamboat, a troubled sea, and eight hours of moonless

night, the occasion is fraught with infinite possibilities for a restless idiot and a stertorously unconscious inebriate. With the readiness of resource born of a roving life, his first act on embarking was to lock these thorns of anxiety into an empty storeroom and pantry respectively under the paddle-boxes, and to post a sentry between them. When in the summer dawn at Vancouver the doors were thrown open, Jannaway knew he was justified of his act of illegal imprisonment. For seated astride his kit-bag, with his head between his hands, was Pagett, loudly praying for sudden death; while in the pantry over the way stood the madman, nude as the hour he was born, and asking the rest of the party what had become of *their* blistered bathing-machines.

Then came the long train journey through the cañons and rifts of the Rockies over the prairie ocean to far-away Montreal. Jannaway—to whose voluptuous nature all beauty appealed, whether flower, or moonrise, or sunset, or the face of a lovely woman—looked forward with no little keenness to enjoying this scenic magnificence. Small leisure, however, in the end did that much-harried subaltern get for gazing on skies or on landscapes. For the mouths of the strange men-children from the outset began to speak vanity; while their right hand, being forcedly idle, was ever a hand of iniquity.

Every conceivable means had been taken by the railway company for the comfort of these, Her Britannic Majesty's servants. In the matter of rations, indeed, they seemed to the vigilant Jannaway to have

touched the verge of extravagance. For whenever he made the rounds of the men's car, were it noonday, or evening, or midnight, its inmates were busily eating ; and yet, like the widow's inexhaustible cruse, their plates never seemed to grow empty. Nevertheless, on the first day's journey at dinner-time they demanded, by the mouth of a chief petty officer, "to see Mister Jannaway."

"Well," said that sorely-trying officer, entering the car, "what is it?"

The daily ration of grog had just been served out, and stood untouched on the tables, while each weather-beaten face wore an expression of the deepest resentment and indignation. In the background, with tears in his eyes, hovered the courteous representative of the railway company.

"Beggin' your pardon, sir," explained the mouth-piece—somewhat sheepishly it must be owned, "but the men don't seem to fancy this 'ere rum no'ow."

"What's wrong with it?" demanded Jannaway ; "hold on ! I'll taste it myself."

He did so—slowly sipping the tot, and carefully turning the spirit about on his tongue, as though he were sampling some priceless vintage. Then he set down the empty cup with a vigour that broke it in two.

"Great Scott!" he exclaimed, "where the deuce does your grievance come in?"

"I beg your pardon, sir—with the colour," explained an aggrieved one, "which it's more lighter than the Service rum, an' we think as the comp'ny's tryin' it on, an' givin' us inferior liquor !"

"You are a lot of suspicious, ignorant sea-lawyers," laughed Jannaway, "who don't know good liquor from poison. Excellent as the Service rum is, this spirit is even better ; personally I should say it's the very best that money can buy." Which indeed was no more than the truth.

Then with a brief reference to the section in the Queen's Regulations *re* the making of frivolous complaints, Jannaway left the car ; and sending for the railway official, he soothed him with honeydew 'baccy and honeyed words of much wisdom. "When you know the British tar," he concluded, "as intimately as I do, you'll perceive that a grievance of some sort is the very breath of his nostrils. If he has no legitimate grievance—and rarely indeed can he find one—he'll invent it with great ingenuity and the ease that comes of long practice."

And the railway official withdrew, much impressed with Jannaway's knowledge of human nature in general and of seafaring men in particular.

Now, when on Her Majesty's business a score of her redcoats or bluejackets journey for long together, it is customary to enforce—for the proper maintaining of discipline—some sort of daily routine. Jannaway's orders on this point were clear and very imperative. He therefore mounted a guard, and posted a constant sentry to keep the Queen's peace in the men's car. "Reveill  ," "retreat," and "last post" were sounded, each in its season, and he duly inspected the party at a morning and evening muster. He had them turned out of their bunks at the man-o'-war hour

for rising, and at ten o'clock every night the hands were piped down as on shipboard. Whenever the train stopped long enough he marched them about for exercise; in short, he fathered his children like a middle-aged *paterfamilias*. Whereat their mouth spake much vanity, for children are ever ungrateful. The train, they indignantly swore, was an adjective shore-going flagship; and they cursed at having to sail under "Admiral Jackanapes Jannaway." They had looked to spend their time solely in eating, and smoking, and slumber; and they deeply resented this wholesome and very mild man-o'-war discipline.

A cloud no bigger than a man's hand, but which presently completely overshadowed Jannaway's bright spirit, arose at eventime on the first day's travel. This was the matter of the woollen underclothing, which had been specially issued at Esquimault to the invalids of the party. The Pacific station orders directed that it was to be put on when leaving the cars at stopping-places, and taken off on returning to them; that it was to be worn in crossing the Atlantic, and then returned to store at Deptford. At the first dépôt Jannaway accordingly commanded that the garments in question should be donned by all invalids wishing to get out and walk. Now the time of the year being midsummer, they took to the thick wool as kindly as a nigger would take to a waistcloth midway an Arctic December. Under their breath they cursed the clothing, the order, the weather—even the innocent Jannaway; and at every subsequent stopping-place, by every means in their power,

they endeavoured to hoodwink the latter. But Jannaway, young as he was, hadn't been born on a yesterday—an additional grievance indeed with his froward and stiff-necked children. Thus the underwear was to the end a bone of contention between them.

While engaged in haranguing his contumacious sick on the subject, and a few minutes before the train proceeded, a telegram was handed to Jannaway informing him that a Marine's greatcoat had been left behind at Vancouver. Jannaway dropped the sick and their underwear, and for fully five minutes let Pagett—the only Marine in the party besides himself and his man—have the rough edge of his tongue on the subject of drunken forgetfulness. As he presently paused for breath, the servant, unconscious of what was going forward, arrived on the scene and saluted.

"I've looked 'igh an' low for 'im, sir," said he, "and I can't find a trace of 'im nowhere."

"Trace of whom?" asked Jannaway testily.

"Of your greatcoat," answered the man, "what you told me this morning to look for. I believe, sir," he suddenly added, "that you left 'im be'ind at Vancouver!"

Whereupon, with the face of an image, Pagett drew his own coat from the corner.

But the tableau was lost upon Jannaway. For the train was beginning to move when a cry smote his horrified ears of "Stop that old cowcatchin' injin—we ain't got our loony aboard!" Then, thrusting his head from the window, the blood in his veins turned

to water, and he bitterly cursed his position. In view of the whole of the passengers, the waiting-room door was flung open, and, hotly pursued by the porters, a nude figure tore down the platform and leaped in the rearmost compartment. By the time Jannaway himself reached it, the ladies were all in hysterics ; while the lunatic, with a purloined collector's punch in his hand, was peremptorily demanding their tickets. Masking him with railway rugs, Jannaway and the male passengers locked him into a lavatory at the end of the car, till such time as he could be fitly removed in a borrowed suit of clothes. His own, he triumphantly explained, were in his bathing-machine at the last station !

And so the long journey wore on, each hour bringing its peculiar trial to the joyless and jaded Jannaway. Nevertheless did he comfort himself with the reflection that, before he can wear the major's crown, or even attain to the heights of the captain's stars, the subaltern of Marines must endure the cross of strange children no less than that of great waters. At Winnipeg, where the train was timed to stop an hour and a half, Jannaway turned out his flock, and seduced them into exercising their legs about the town by telling them wondrous tales of pigs made into sausages while you wait. On their return to the station—highly incensed at his failure to show them these promised joys—a certain tar made great uproar, saying he had lost a dog he was taking home to his sweetheart, and that he'd be withered, and singed, and condemned if he'd enter the train without it.



Jannaway's spirit being by this time completely broken, he allowed the man to go back with a search party, thereby delaying the train and rendering exceedingly choleric the traffic manager and others. Nor did their righteous anger abate one jot when, the searchers having returned, the innocent cause of the trouble was discovered curled up in his owner's bunk—which, it transpired, he had never quitted at all.

But the next day a thing befell which produced the first of Jannaway's prematurely grey hairs. The train had just left a small prairie station, where the wily tars, unknown to themselves, had been grossly cheated in the matter of buffalo horns by still wilier Indians—when word was brought that Private Pagett had been left behind! He had been last seen haggling with a copper-coloured gentleman of loudly-vaunted integrity over the purchase of a pair of horns destined for the bar of a certain Dartmoor hostelry he had long had his eye on. These were the selfsame horns, indeed, under which Mr. Pagett subsequently related to me *his* version of the home-coming. It was interesting in showing how different is the style of two artists in telling the same simple story. From it one gathered that the irreproachable soldier of long and varied experience had been throughout that trying journey the mainstay and trusted counsellor of his officer; and that at parting the latter had shaken hands, and with tears in his eyes thanked him for his invaluable assistance and advice. But whatever Jannaway may have said to Mr. Pagett on Waterloo platform—and I

have reason to believe he said many things—at the present juncture of affairs, and for fully five minutes, he damned the absentee with a marvellous wealth of epithet. Yet the most impassioned utterances are ever unavailing to restore the lost one; and that night Jannaway dreamt he was arraigned before a general court-martial on the charge of losing by neglect the following article, namely, soldiers (one in number) of Her Majesty's regular forces.

Heaviness may endure for a night, but joy cometh in the morning; and lo! at daybreak Private Pagett was back again. He had his cherished buffalo horns with him, and he was in a condition of complete nervous collapse. For the station-master—anxious, apparently, to be rid of him at all costs—had forwarded the laggard on a light pilot engine; and the twelve hours' jumping and rocking thereof over the roughly-laid track had well-nigh shaken (this is Pagett's expression) his something liver out of his something mouth.

And so it came to pass that Jannaway and his children were presently brought to Montreal, whence they went down to the sea in an Allan steamship. The voyage across the Atlantic was a time of comparative peace to the former; for the familiar surroundings of their native element seemed to exercise a restraining influence upon those horny right hands of iniquity. Yet on the first morning out, a middle-aged, very damp citizen sought audience of Jannaway, loudly reviling the tars, who were berthed in his part of the vessel. They had risen at four, he complained,

and, following Jannaway's orders and their barbarous naval routine, had flooded the place with cold water and a fiendish racket of scrubbing. He had paid for his berth, he said, and he preferred it dry and dirty; and he would see Jannaway in Hades before he would be woke up at cockcrow and compelled to spend the rest of the day in a snipe marsh. Jannaway, well knowing that his black sheep themselves were at the bottom of this overdone indignation, conferred with the skipper, with the result that the purser presently shifted the damp agitator to a berth near the galley fire. Whereat he was very pleased, and the machinations of the wicked were brought to nought.

In spite of this unpromising beginning, Jannaway ever after regarded the six days between Montreal and Liverpool as an interval of blessed consciousness in a long and dreadful nightmare. From the outset the youthful, dissipated-looking shepherd roused the interest of his fairer shipmates—who correctly guessed at a third of his sins, and satisfactorily (to themselves) invented the remainder. Jannaway, who loved the sex in general, had focussed his affections by the end of the first day on two members of it in particular; and before the close of the second he had determined to prolong the acquaintanceship by travelling with them to London.

But face to face once more with the grim realities of life on the Liverpool landing-stage, he had to climb down from his newly-built castle in Spain. For indeed the fair ones must have been half-way to Euston before the last of Jannaway's happy tars

rolled into Lime Street Station. With the sole exception of Pagett—who would have conjured liquor out of the sand of a desert island—they were fearfully and wonderfully sober, though they were perfectly intoxicated with joy at setting foot once more on an English pavement. They dawdled along, chattering in front of Jannaway like a kindergarten class out for an airing ; and each man carried a pair of buffalo horns, or shells, or a parrot cage, or a banjo, or a combination of two or more of these necessaries of sailor existence. In rear came Mr. Pagett and the “loony,” each led by a couple of comrades—the former because he was obviously incapable of steering himself through the traffic, and the latter because of his great desire to bathe in the public street from a cabman’s shelter. Finally, like the angel in the Garden of Eden driving before him our unwilling parents, stalked Jannaway with his sword, driving his children. And when he had seen them and their parrots and banjoes locked safely into the train, in the temple of Spiers and Pond he poured out for thankfulness a libation of golden whisky.

But Jannaway had other things to do before the train started besides the drinking of whisky. For at Liverpool began the scattering of his flock to folds all over the United Kingdom ; and to hospitals, coast-guard stations, depôt ships and barracks, telegrams must needs be sent heralding their arrival. Although these strange and wayward sheep drifted away shepherdless in threes, and twos, and singly to their distant

destinations, to the credit of the Service be it recorded that every one of them turned up at the hour stated in the telegram.

With the bulk of the party Jannaway went to London, and on arrival he was nearly as mad as the bathing-machine monomaniac. For great is the mental anxiety of him who conducteth the volatile tar on a homeward-bound railway journey. To travel on the footboard of an express train seemed to be the correct thing in naval circles, and a glimpse from the window of a phantom bluejacket dancing a hornpipe on the roof of the train's shadow affected Jannaway's nerves for weeks afterwards. At the stations, to assure himself that no one was left behind, he perpetually attempted the impossible feat of looking out of both windows at once; and Willesden Junction, where half the party had to change, reminded him of a giddy-go-round at a show. The three precious moments available for the change were frittered away by the tars in gingerly handing to each other from the carriages their parrot cages and shells; and great was their indignation when the buffalo horns and banjoes were left behind on the platform. Small wonder the guard blasphemed when a bluejacket genially asked him not to shove off with the qualified train till he'd said good-bye to Bill in the other party.

But to the bitter end the greatest of all Jannaway's trials was Private Pagett of his own regiment. The nearer that Queen's hard bargain approached his

destination and civilian life, the greater grew his reluctance to travel in the same compartment with common bluejackets. At length, wearied by his importunity, Jannaway arranged with the guard to transfer him to an empty second class, where he speedily fell asleep and was forgotten. Naturally, he failed to get out at Willesden; and when Jannaway mustered the party at Waterloo, it was found that Mr. Pagett for the second time had been left behind. While the weary shepherd, however, was expending curses on the lost sheep himself and sixpences in telegraphic inquiries after him, there arrived in the station yard on the top of a Euston 'bus a snoring private of the regular forces with a pair of buffalo horns buckled up in a waistbelt. On being roused by the conductor he explained that he was Mr. Pagett, the landlord, and that he would have him (the conductor) understand that he allowed no shady characters to hang about his "Coach and Horses."

And so it came to pass that Jannaway, subaltern of the sea regiment and unrepentant prodigal, stood presently upon Waterloo platform, gloomily watching the tail lights of the train which bore away upon their home-coming the last of the strange children. Of the subsequent official correspondence, relating mainly to the suit of warm clothing left by the lunatic in his prairie bathing-machine, Jannaway spoke with tears. It promised, he said, to run through the rest of his life like the sad-coloured strand which is woven with government rope. But that wet July evening, at all events, the prodigal spent at the "Empire"; for

after three years of great waters he hungered for footlight frivolity.

Yet the candle—and this is wisdom—may not be burned at both ends. With his head on a marble table, Jannaway, leader of men, slept like a worn-out child.

SHINNYBEGGAR, SECOND-CLASS STOKER





## SHINNYBEGGAR

“SHINNYBEGGAR, a miss about 'alf a mile over the top o' the target! If you're anyways as 'andy with a shovel as you are with a rifle, you must be a perfec' gawdsend in the stoke'old on a steam trial. That makes you nine misses and a rackoshee!”

The gunner's mate made public this brilliant score in so stentorian a voice, and recorded it upon the register with such an ostentatious cypher, that the sensitive Shinnybeggar was moved to a mild remonstrance.

“And everythink always works agin me,” he concluded plaintively, as he fumbled with the breech of his Lee-Metford.

“You'll find ME work agin you, my lad,” retorted the unsympathetic gunner's mate, “if you don't close your cut-off before pushing back the bolt o' that there rifle. If you'd only pay attention to me, you'd learn something; if you don't pay attention to me, you—well, you won't learn nothing.”

The lameness of this conclusion, however, seemed

to strike him ; for addressing the squad of stokers in general, and with a sudden assumption of fierceness, he added—

“And let me tell you all that I’ve redooed the art of annoyance to a science. Sound the ‘cease fire!’ bugler.”

Now since it is plainly idle to bandy words with a man who persists in shutting both eyes whenever he shoots, and who—as a not unnatural consequence—fails to hit the target once out of ten rounds, the gunner’s mate turned his back for a moment upon Second-Class Stoker Shinnybeggar ; and in that moment much happened. The six shrill notes of the bugle call rang out from the firing-point, and the red danger flag fluttered responsively above the distant mantlet. The two bluejacket markers quitted that iron shelter, and sauntered up to the target jauntily swinging a pail of whitewash between them. Then came the crack of a Lee-Metford, the singing down the range of a cordite-driven bullet, and its vicious spit as it drilled its way through the pail ; and like a pair of panic-stricken piebald rabbits, the whitewash-spattered tars scampered back to their iron burrow.

The gunner’s mate spun round upon his heel, as though he, and not the pail, had been shot.

“What the ’ell do you mean,” he demanded, snatching Shinnybeggar’s smoking rifle out of his hands, “by loosing off after the ‘cease fire!’ ’as sounded?”

“I didn’t know as there was another cartridge left in the magazine,” explained Shinnybeggar, with a

scared face, "an' I touched the trigger, an'—an' every bloomin' thing seems to work agin me!"

Then the lieutenant-instructor in charge of the ranges arrived very much out of breath from the 600 yards firing point, demanding to be informed who the—which the—what the—was the matter. Shinnybeggar's explanation that "his rifle 'ad worked agin 'im" availed him nothing. He was promptly placed between an escort and sent back to his ship a prisoner, on a charge of endangering the lives of his comrades by gross carelessness upon the range. A bad quarter of an hour before the skipper on the quarter-deck the following morning resulted in a fortnight of extreme discomfort to Shinnybeggar, second-class stoker. It was described officially as "14 days' No. 10 A," and served to strengthen its subject in the conviction that every one and everything here below had entered into a conspiracy to "work agin him."

And indeed it must be admitted that Shinnybeggar's career in the lurid stokehold lent some little colour to this oft-reiterated assertion of his. Was there a scald or a burn to be picked up—and there are always plenty of each variety going begging round the doors of those submarine furnaces—be sure that Shinnybeggar it was who found it. "Everything works agin me" was the subject phrase, so to speak, of his life's song—which since the opening bars of his wailing infancy had never changed from the monotonous minor. For Peter Schneeberger—to give him his patronymic as it stood on the ship's books—was an undersized, slum-bred Londoner, who,

with the minimum chest measurement, had just contrived to scrimshank through the medical test for the Service at a time when the stoker article was very far from being a drug in the market. Yet in spite of his poor physique and proneness to accident, he was deemed by his superiors in the engine-room department the most willing and hard-working hand of all the odd hundred who stoked the great battleship's fires.

With the ten who chanced to be his own messmates, however, it must be confessed that Shinny-beggar was far from popular. Much as they appreciated his strenuous labours below—which naturally tended to lighten their own—on the mess-deck he was a veritable spectre at the feast; and this they took occasion to tell him—with much Anglo-Saxon embroidery—some forty times a day. So frequent an expression of their opinion must have been, as Shinny-beggar would now and then weakly protest, “very wearing”; yet on the other hand, a gentleman who takes up money savings in lieu of one-third of his Service rations, who lives exclusively on the remainder, and who steadfastly refuses to spend a halfpenny of his sea wages either on himself or on his messmates, cannot be said to contribute greatly to the gaiety of nations. This apparent monomania it was which, taken in conjunction with his baptismal name and patronymic, once prompted the mess wag to call him (with the usual Anglo-Saxon embroidery) a German Jew. Whereat Shinnybeggar, the hyper-sensitive, betook himself to the dim recesses of a coal-bunker and wept.

Now, in spite of men who, in Service parlance, would "growl the hind leg off a donkey," it is a positive fact that the daily ration provided by Her Majesty for each of her lower-deck servants is both ample and good. The quality of the beef and the vegetables, the biscuit and cocoa, the tea and the rum leaves little, if anything, to be desired ; while their quantity, even when reduced by one-third for the sake of the monetary compensation, is very much more than sufficient to keep body and soul together. None the less is variety charming afloat than ashore ; and in order that Jack, dear pampered fellow ! may purchase this variety (if he wills) at the smallest possible cost, a dry canteen is provided for him on board, and a bumboatman attends on the ship.

But although on the toothsome wares of canteen and bumboat alike Shinnybeggar would often cast sheep's eyes, he would have none of either. And truth to tell he was sore tempted ; for his appetite of late had grown jaded with a surfeit of beef and biscuit, and even for his voluntarily reduced ration he had little enough stomach. The weather moreover was sultry—I am speaking of Malta at midsummer—and a hot, damp, siroc' wind troubled the face of the stagnant harbour, and covered men's boots in the night season with green mould. It so chanced, too, that a hot-press of work was toward in those gloomy regions where Shinnybeggar and his fellows earned their bread so literally by the sweat of their brow ; and ofttimes his heart sank within him as he squeezed himself through the tiny manhole to his task in the

empty, dim, suffocating boiler beyond. Why, he would querulously ask, should a black siroc' choose a time to blow when extra work had to be done, and he was feeling anything but up to dick? But then everything always had worked agin him.

Well assured am I that neither "dangers of the sea" nor "violence of the enemy" (from which, in the quaint language of the Book of Common Prayer, we daily pray to be delivered) could daunt for one moment the gallant tarrybrecks of Britain. But there is one thing which grips their very vitals with fear, and that is a falling away of the appetite. So unfamiliar an experience, they argue, can only mean approaching dissolution. That Shinnybeggar had ceased to "fancy" his victuals had long been a matter of remark on the lower-deck—even as far aft as the Marines' messes. When therefore it became known one infernal afternoon that Shinnybeggar had been discovered in a dead faint upon the *débris* platform of the engine-room, the lower deck with one accord wagged its head, and opined that the (embroidered) German Jew was at length set out in earnest for the New Jerusalem.

They carried him to the sick bay, and a thermometer being thrust beneath his tongue and his temperature found to be "up," the steward presently went in search of Blood-red Bill, M.D., of Glasgow, and staff-surgeon in Her Majesty's fleet. At sight of whom the patient's temperature disrespectfully rose to a hundred and four point five.

Some thirty years previously a tourist in the outer

Hebrides had flung a sixpence to a bare-legged, red-haired crofter urchin turning cartwheels in the roadway. Before the lad could secure it, however, the "siller" was pounced upon and swallowed by a foolish collie pup at play hard by, who presently paid for this youthful indiscretion with his life.

Now the botanical fact that sixpenny-bits do not grow on every bush in the outer Hebrides rendered the recovery of this hidden treasure most desirable. The boy moreover burned with an unholy curiosity to see for himself the havoc wrought by a rough-edged coin upon a puppy's vitals. With a blunt clasp-knife, therefore, and upon the paternal doorstone, he conducted the first of a long series of *post-mortems*, which culminated—no later than last week—in the autopsy on the illustrious and lamented Rear-Admiral Telfer-Bagge.

For, in that bloody morning's work upon the doorstep, the pious crofter parents saw clearly the finger of Providence indicating their offspring's future calling. With characteristic thrift they added year by year to the hoard of hard-earned bawbees beneath the hearth-stone, until the day came when the moderate fees of the Clyde University could be compassed, and the pride of the village dominie sent forth to learn anatomy at Glasgie. And great, be sure, were the rejoicings of honest dominie and village alike upon that red-letter day when, to the credit of all concerned, the shock-headed laddie of their remembrance became an officer and gentleman in Her Majesty's naval service. A combination of circumstances—the



aggressively warm tint of his hair, the exceeding ruddiness of his countenance, the strip of crimson cloth upon his coat cuffs, and his cheerful readiness upon the smallest pretext with the operating knife—soon gained him the sobriquet of “Blood-red Bill”; while upon his watch-chain there dangled for luck the sixpence he had filched when a kilted bairn from the digestive organs of a dissected dog.

Now, it was an article of Blood-red Bill’s simple faith that the virtue most acceptable to the Director-General at Whitehall was a rigid economy in the matter of medical stores and comforts. This method of laying up for himself treasure in the only heaven he cared two straws about found little enough favour, you may be sure, with the honest tarrybreeks his patients. Consider also that the monomania was grafted upon a deep-rooted racial instinct towards thrift, and—you will thank Providence that you were not one of the patients. “Barts,” the newly-joined surgeon, and Blood-red Bill’s assistant, under whose more immediate care the fever-stricken Shinnybeggar would ordinarily have come, was himself in hospital with typhoid. A thoroughly up-to-date, hard-reading, painstaking young medico was this ex-house-surgeon of Bartholomew’s—a fair type of the doctors who as a rule tend the sick and wounded of our fleet to-day.

Never in truth had Fortune worked more shabbily “agin” Shinnybeggar than when she consigned him in his extremity to the tender mercies of the most notorious exception to that rule. You are to clearly understand, however, that the Blood-red Bill of the

Service is now as extinct as the great-billed dodo of Mauritius.

On the Sunday afternoon following the fainting fit, one of Shinnybeggar's messmates obtained permission to visit him in the sick bay. All the morning the patient had spent sitting up in his cot, laboriously writing on half a sheet of canteen note-paper with a pencil stump; and being doubly handicapped by illiteracy and physical weakness, the exertion had completely worn him out. The visitor, noting this, proceeded to "cheer him up a bit" in the most approved manner of his kind.

"'Ave you 'eard the noos about the jaunty?" he began, with ominous solemnity.

Now, the news about the jaunty—officially known as the master-at-arms—having been carefully kept from Shinnybeggar, he languidly replied that he had not.

"Well—'e's gone 'ome," announced the other in a portentous whisper.

"I wish to Gawd they'd send me 'ome," wailed Shinnybeggar weakly: "a sight o' the Old Kent Road I do believe 'ud make a noo man o' me!"

The visitor stroked his chin musingly. "I'm thinkin'," he said, "that it's a lonelier road than the Old Kent as the jaunty's a-travellin' on. It was 'is long 'ome as I was a-talkin' of, chum."

The chum sat bolt upright in his cot, his face as white as the counterpane.

"You don't mean to say as the jaunty's *dade*?" he asked in a scared voice.

"Dead as a deadlight—from 'eat aperiexy," explained the comforter, with the pardonable pride of a man first in the field with great tidings. Whereat Shinnybeggar, weakened by fever and months of voluntary low diet, fell back on the pillow and sobbed like a child.

Staggered as this well-meaning gossip was at the effect of his news, he nevertheless retained sufficient presence of mind to point out the silver lining to the cloud. "We give 'im a first-chop funeral yesterday afternoon," he hastened to add, "number one cloth on the cawfin, an' wreaths from the captin, an' the ward-room officers, an' the ship's police, an' the bumboatman as well!"

These details, as he had divined, were not without interest to Shinnybeggar, who checked his sobs to listen.

"I'm a-goin' 'ome myself, chum," he whispered presently, with conviction.

"Not you!" said the other hastily, and with a breezy assurance in his tone he was far from feeling. "All you've got to do is to drink your port wine and swaller your orange jelly, and you'll live to be a hundred."

"Blood-red Bill," explained Shinnybeggar wistfully, "don't 'old with port wine, nor yet with orange jelly neither; they cost such a 'ell of a lot o' money."


"I suppose you could 'ardly expect it," admitted his friend, who had strong racial prejudices, "off a man who 'ails from a country o' bare-legged, barbarious, bagpiping bleeders."

But the vehemence of this alliterative indignation

awoke the somnolent steward in the corner, who, noting the patient's agitation and learning its cause, promptly expelled the newsmonger with ignominy from the sick bay.

More wasted and feeble each day grew Shinny-beggar, second-class stoker; and as his miserable appetite continued to decrease the more frightened about himself he became. The fever indeed had left him—presumably from a total lack of anything to support itself upon—but the man was dying none the less from an insufficiency of proper nourishment. In vain did the chief engineer hint darkly at “making a quarter-deck matter of it”; in vain did the wardroom mess offer to send for’ard to the sick bay a case of their number one port. Neither by threat nor free gift of costly “medical comfort” was Blood-red Bill, the Obstinate, to be moved. Not for a single instant, he blustered, would he brook interference with that low diet system which he invariably prescribed for typhoid and toothache alike. And in truth the medical officer should ever be an autocrat in his own sick bay.

That the mind of this particular autocrat should have been warped by so harmful a craze was deplorable. The Director-General, like all other heads of departments who control vast sums of the public money, naturally enough deprecated anything like extravagance in its expenditure. But had he learnt that this enjoined economy was being practised by one of his subordinates to the detriment of the patient's health, it is certain that there would presently have

been a right royal row. Again I say, most cruel was it of Fortune to lay by the heels at this juncture Barts the Kindly, the Typical, the Up-to-date. 

One evening, as the chief engineer was moodily looking up "Manslaughter" in Barts' *Medical Jurisprudence*, Blood-red Bill rushed into the wardroom and hurriedly ordered the wine steward to open a bottle of Heidsieck.

"There's a mon i' the sick bay," he explained, lapsing into the speech of his youth, "that I'm thinking might be the bonnier for it."

"Champagne for the sick bay—good Lord!" The chief engineer closed his book with a bang. "Then, here endeth the lesson," he groaned, "and one, I trust, that will serve you for the remainder of your career."

"My puir fule," retorted Blood-red Bill hotly, "dinna talk o' matters ye ken nothing about. Because I chance to see your domned dynamoes being lubricated, I shouldna therefore antecipate that the electric light is in danger o' going out!"

The sick bay steward, cap in hand, stood upon the threshold.

"That there case Shinnybeggar, sir," he announced, in a conventionally subdued voice, "'as just drawed his last breath."

A moment after Blood-red Bill had hurried from the wardroom his troubled face appeared again in the doorway.

"I wish you fellows would have a look round," he said, "I've lost the lucky saxpence off my watch-chain. And by the bye, stewarrrd, ye needna charrge that

bottle to the sick account. Ye can just corrk it up again."

"After all," said the chief engineer bitterly, "I doubt if such dreadful extravagance would have been justified. The light had grown so very dim, you see!"

\* \* \* \* \*

In the dead man's ditty-box they found a thumbed and crumpled half-sheet of canteen note-paper, on which the following had been laboriously scrawled in pencil:—

"This is my last will and testament so help my God. I give and Bequeeth all my money and Privit effex to my only Rellation in the World my deer brother whats ad a Stroke and is Entirely dependant on me. Given under my and on board H.M.S. *Ramherdown* at Malta this 21 day of June signed Peter Schneeberger 2nd Class stoker R.N."

But it presently transpired that the paralytic also was dead. Wherefore it may be hoped that the minor music of the brothers' lives had changed to a joyful duet in the major, and that they had met at last in a country where things no more would "work agin" them.



## PRINGLE'S PROGRESS





## PRINGLE'S PROGRESS

"Pagett, M.P., was a liar, and a fluent liar therewith."

*Departmental Ditties.*

THE Pagett of this tale was also an M.P.—a Marine Pensioner—and, after a single pipe smoked in his company, I recognised that the ex-sea-soldier was fully the equal in mendacity of Mr. Kipling's immortal legislator.

When, however, I pleasantly suggested the parallel to him, he resented the compliment with much unnecessary vehemence, being carried, indeed, by his feelings to the extreme length of stigmatising all sceptics—with more force than fitness—as sanguinary, lop-eared lepers. Hear, then, and judge, I pray you, between this latter-day liar and me.

In the best parlour of the "Coach and Horses" I had lighted upon an old edition of John Bunyan's great allegory, and, lugging it out to a bench among the hollyhocks and sunflowers in the quaint inn garden, I began idly to amuse myself with its rude eighteenth-century woodcuts. After a long day's

work with colours and canvas upon the golden and purple moor, there seemed to be a certain fitness in this chance encounter at eventide with the Bedford dreamer; and, as I presently fell to reading, the bassoon of a bee deep among the flowers, the flute cadenzas of a thrush in the orchard, the murmuring *vox humana* of the brook, the tympanum of surf upon the shore—Nature's orchestra, in a word, at its evening practice—played a subdued accompaniment to the dreamer's inspired prose.

"He was a proper old soldier, I reckon, was that there Pringle," broke in a raucous voice at my elbow. "Route marchin' with a pack on didn't use to suit me no more than it did 'im—you may take your oath to that! But bust me if ever I could scrimshank out of carrying mine!"

"Who er—was Pringle?" I asked.

"Why, him in the book," explained the speaker, jerkily indicating with his pipe-stem the tattered volume on my knee, "him what wheeled the Devil into line and swam the river—barrin' his pack—in 'eavy marchin' order!"

"Oh!" I said, "I understand. You're talking of *Pilgrim's Progress*."

"Pilgrim, then, if you prefer it, sir; it's all one to me. I never could get my tongue round some o' they breakjaw names of Bible bigwigs," he complained, with more alliteration than relevance. "But what I says is, Pilgrim or Pringle, where's the odds so long as we both mean the same bloke?"

"Where indeed?" I echoed. "I have met many

pilgrims myself, and by any other name, no doubt, they would have smelt as—sweet !”

“Pringle’s” admirer was a brown-haired, brown-skinned, brown-trousered-and-slippered man in a grey coat and waistcoat, which gave him the appearance of having been taken out of the oven before he was sufficiently baked through the middle. So braced back were his shoulders, moreover, that his chest, deprived thus of its natural grips, had slipped apparently to a resting-place on the waistband of his breeches. This human surprise-packet was no other ~~indeed~~ than the driver of the “Coach and Horses,” and, incidentally, of hard bargains with its occasional patrons. “His name,” creaked the newly-lettered signboard overhead, “is PAGETT, and rust my hinges if there ain’t six whole books of gold leaf in it !”

Closing the other book of golden pages, I filled and lighted a pipe.

“You are an old soldier yourself, Mr. Pagett ?” I hazarded presently, when I had got it to draw.

My host jerked himself out of the brown study into which—consistently with his general scheme of colour—he had lapsed.

“Guessed it first time !” he replied, carefully spitting to leeward. “I did my twenty-one in the Marines, d’ye see, and if that don’t constitoot a old soldier, why—call me a liar, that’s all !”

Well, it is some satisfaction to think that I have freely availed myself of his invitation since. At the time, however, I offered him my pouch instead, and made room beside me on the bench.

"You must have had some queer experiences during those twenty-one years *per mare, per terram*," I insinuated, quoting the well-known motto of the famous sea regiment.

"A good few," he assented airily; "let's see—give me time to overhaul my thinking tackle a bit."

As an outward and visible sign of this mental exercise he thrust his brown thumbs through the arm-holes of the underdone waistcoat, and breathed stertorously at the sky.

"There was that single-anded rough-and-tumble with the three Fuzzies outside Suakim," he mused, "when I lost a button off 'o my duck toonic, and got three days' janking for it. Then there's the matter o' the cutter capsetting in the surf off Pemba, when the sharks got thirteen out o' fourteen of us, and I was put under stoppages for losing my 'elmet. Oh! and there's the badge I lost for giving a man good advice in Port R'yal dockyard."

"But surely——" I began.

He checked me by laying his brown forefinger on my sleeve.

"The man was the Commodore, you see, and commodores are notor'ously shy of takin' advice from privates. It was this way, look. I run foul of him, tackin' round a sharp corner. 'Do you know who I am, my man?' says he, drawing hisself up. 'I do that,' says I; 'and a damned good billet you've got. Now, you just take my advice,' I says, 'and don't you go for to lose it through drink!'"

"I am afraid you yourself, Mr. Pagett——"

"Well, about three sheets in the wind, we'll say—no more. But there, discipline *is* discipline in the Marines, and you ain't allowed to play hanky-panky with commodores no more than you may let sharks and Fuzzies play hanky-panky with your free kit!"

He filled his pipe from my pouch and lit it.

"I was redooted, too, from lance-corpril," he continued aggrievedly, "all because the jib-sheet jammed, and the bloomin' train missed stays!"

"Ship," I corrected softly.

"Train," he insisted.

"Oh!" I said, after a moment's pause, "you are speaking figuratively. You mean, I suppose, that the engine broke down."

"No, I don't," he retorted, "for the very good reason that there wasn't no injin. We was under sail."

Here, plainly, was an interesting case—an inventive mind in labour with a quaint conceit. Under the influence of a little alcoholic stimulant there was presently brought forth a fine, healthy lie. Afterwards I stood sponsor to the lie, and named it "Pringle's Progress."

"You'll mind that bit of a bobbery we had some time back with Venezuela?" he began, when a jug and glasses stood between us on the bench. "Very well. I was serving in the squadron on the south-east coast of America at the time, in one of the 'C' class corvettes; as a matter of fact, the—the *Canary* her name was—fourteen guns. You may have heard tell of her?"

He glanced at me out of the tail of his eye.

"Had a bright yellow streak painted round her upper works, hadn't she, and a sprig of groundsel underneath her name?"

The glance grew to a glare. He was thinking of lop-eared lepers, perhaps.

"That's of her," he growled at length, "her very moral. You've a wonnerful memory for ships, you have, for a shoregoin' gentleman!"

I bowed my acknowledgments.

"Our skipper," he continued, "was a Captin Jones—Captin John Jones—Captin the Honourable John Jones, and the first lootenant's name was—er—was—damme! I shall forget my own blessed tally next."

"Call him Pringle," I suggested.

"*Call* 'im Pringle!" he returned scornfully; "I ain't a-goin' to invent no names in this yer true yarn, mister, thank you! But s'help me if you haven't 'it the right nail on the 'ead this time, all the same! His name *was* Pringle."

I hastily transferred some of the contents of the jug to the tumbler, and thence to my interior economy.

"All that weary time," he went on, "that the British Gover'ment was arguin' the point with this cheeky Venezuelan kid, it had a nice little cane handy be'ind its back; and our squadron was the cane, d'ye see. For a week or two we were kep' backin' and fillin' off the coast, spoilin' to give the kid his lickin' and have done with it, till one day noos of sorts came

out to the admiral when we was off Trinidad. Bimebye the flagship broke out all over in bunting, like a church bazaar, and jerked her semaphore till it made you giddy to watch it. Then things began to buzz a bit. All plain sail was made, every boiler lighted up, and we tore away on a westerly course before half a gale o' wind and a big followin' sea, rollin' our nettings under a'most. When we come to the Paria Peninsula, howsomever, the *Canary* parted company with the rest o' the squadron—they takin' the northern side, and we the southern—right into the gulf o' that name. All through the night we carried on, till at daybreak we let go the killick before a small fishin' village—I forget its name—in the extreme western corner o' the gulf. It was this way, look."

He dipped his pipe-stem in the tumbler by his side, and traced upon the bench a fairly accurate outline of the north-eastern corner of Venezuela. Mr. Pagett's geography, at least, was beyond reproach.

"Well, as soon as things was all shipshape on the fo'c'sle, the 'ands piped down and the watch called, the skipper sends for the first lieutenant in his cabin. 'Mr. Pringle,' he says, 'the admiral has had noos——'"

"How did you come to know what the captain said?" I inquired indiscreetly.

Mr. Pagett addressed himself with veiled sarcasm to the pictorial coach and horses above his head.

"Of course," he said, "I couldn't have been sentry on the cabin-door—of course not. And even supposin' I had been, of course I always did my sentry-



go with cotton-wool in my year'oles for fear of year-ache."

"I'm sorry—I apologise," I said meekly.

He magnanimously refilled his pipe from my pouch, and continued.

"'Mister Pringle,' says the skipper, 'the admiral has had noos that war is likely to be declared to-day. Where he's going with the rest of the squadron don't matter to us a tinker's curse, but this yer does. One ship, the *Parrot*, is to be left off Cariaco, the town on the other side of this isthmus, and between us we've got a job of work to do.'

"'And what may that be, sir?' says the first lieutenant.

"'The local militia is musterin' there—about four thousand of 'em,' returns the skipper, 'and while the *Parrots* talk to 'em this evening in front, d'ye see, the *Canaries* will sing to them be'ind.'

"'That's a very high-class arrangement for the *Parrots*, sir, who are bein' took there in their own cage, so to speak,' says Mister Pringle, 'but what price the *Canaries*? We've got sixty miles of bloomin' isthmus to hop across before the concert begins!'

"'And thunderin' big feet some of you have got to do it on,' cries the skipper, who could be a pleasant-spoken gentleman when he liked; 'but it's this way, Pringle,' he says. 'The Venezuelan R'yal Engineers have just laid down a light railway across the isthmus from Cariaco to this place, and, if you'll look out o' the stern port, you'll see a train with steam up waitin' to start. Now the fishin' fleet—all the crews of

which belong to the militia—is hourly expected That there train thinks it is going to run a big reinforcement for the Cariaco garrison; what do you think about it, Pringle?’

“I venture to hope, sir,’ says number one, ‘that she will carry there, instead, the standing part o’ this ship’s company.’

“I am sanguine enough to hope the same,’ says the skipper. ‘You, of course, will go in command, Pringle. You will take with you the lootenant of Marines and his detachment, Mr. Bodger, the bo’sun, two of the young gentlemen and a couple of hundred bluejackets; and you will start at once.’

“My orders are to——?’ begins the first lootenant.

“Hit damned hard,’ says the skipper, ‘and then sit tight till I pick you up from the ship.’”

Mr. Pagett emptied the jug, and—in a frenzy composition, presumably—set it bottom upwards upon the bench. On the principle that it is a pity to spoil the ship for lack of a ha’porth of tar, I caused the vessel to be replenished, and the story proceeded.

“By four bells in the mornin’ watch we were all in the boats, armed, equipped, and provisioned for our little picnic, and pullin’ towards the landin’-place for all we were worth. The water had just begun to shoal, when Pringle ’e sings out from the pinnace, ‘Jump, you cripples,’ he sings, ‘unless you want a sixty-mile walk on empty stummicks. They’re startin’ the blessed train!’

"My word! It didn't take us long to clear out o' the boats at that noos. But the train was standin' nearly a quarter of a mile from the landin'-place, with the injin already beginning to move, for they'd tumbled to our little dodge, d'ye see. Such a splashin', stragglin', cursin' and swearin' picnic party as we was you never saw! So soon as I gets clear of the water, I whips out a cartridge, pulls back the bolt o' my rifle, and drops on one knee.

"'Will I pick off that injin-driver and his mate, sir?' I says to Pringle, who was just be'ind me.

"'NO, you blitherin' idjut,' he roars, 'war ain't been declared yet!'

"The next minute we all stops runnin' and swearin', and bursts out laughin' instead. For the injin, with a full head o' steam on, was tearin' along the line at the rate o' knots—only they'd forgotten in their panic, d'you see, to couple it on to the carriages! They'd forgotten the points, too, a railway bein' a sort o' new toy to 'em, and all of a sudden she turned into a short siding, and flattened herself out in a cloud o' steam, an' dust, and red-'ot cinders against the buffer bank at the end of it.

"'There go two of the Venezuelan R'yal Engineers to get some militia barracks ready in kingdom come,' says the man next to me.

"'That's fit and proper enough in its way,' I returns, 'but all the same, I wish they'd stopped here, and saved us that sixty-mile march to Cariaco.'

"'We shan't foot it,' says he.

“‘Why in thunder not?’ I asks. ‘There ain’t no other injin, and what other means——?’”

“‘Pringle will provide,’ says he, with a confidence I didn’t feel myself.

“Pringle meanwhile was dictatin’ a telegraph in Spanish to the operator at the little dog-kennel of a station. As Pringle knew Morse besides Spanish, and as he kep’ a revolver clapped to the operator’s head all the time, the nigger couldn’t well play him false, d’ye see. The message was sent to the railway officials all along the line; and then Pringle ’andcuffed the operator, cut the wire, and danced on the instrument in his sea boots.

“Bimebye the expected fishin’ fleet arrived, and lined up inside the harbour mole. The crews’ back ’air stood on end with astonishment, and their eyes stood out like ’atpegs, when they saw us swarmin’ on board their boats; for they had on’y just passed the *Canary*, mind you, peacefully steamin’ out o’ the gulf. Of course, neither they nor the villagers, unarmed as they were, could show fight; and in less than an hour we had shifted all the masts, sails, and tackle we required from the boats to the station. Then we started in to rig the train.”

Talk of the old masters! What was Ananias with his world-renowned tarradiddle compared with this modern artist in imaginative mendacity?

“We unshipped the foremost lamp of every carriage—there were six of ’em—and stepped a mast through each hole. They were tall stout spars, mind you, plenty long enough for the heel of each to rest on the

carriage floor ; and we lashed 'em to the rack above and to the stanchions of the seat below.

"When we had stepped the six masts as securely as possible in this way, we still further set 'em up on deck—on the roof, I mean—with shrouds ; and we fixed along the edges of the roof the necessary cleats and blocks for the sheets. After we had lashed a mizzenmast along the top o' the foremost carriage for a bowsprit, we bent sails, rove the runnin' gear, and coiled down ropes. Then Pringle told us off into watches, and read out our stations. I was put on the lop-eared, leprous jib-sheet !"

"It jammed," I murmured sympathetically.

"It did that," he responded indignantly, "and got me redooced—the blighter !"

He paused a few moments to brood, doubtless, on the instability of human rank and power. Then seeking—and finding, apparently—consolation in the jug, he briskly wiped his mouth with a canteen Lee-Metford handkerchief, and continued.

"By Pringle's orders the bo'sun's mate piped down, and all of us, bar the watch left on the roof, climbed in through the carriage windows. 'I'm a-goin' to make sail and get under weigh with the watch alone, Mister Bodger,' sings out Pringle from his post on the roof o' the guard's van ; and, 'Aye, aye, sir !' roars back the bo'sun from the bowsprit end.

"Then we in the carriages heers over'ead the shufflin' of the bluejackets' bare feet, an' the stampin' of the marines' ammunition boots, an' the barkin' o' Pringle's orders, an' the thunder of Mister Bodger's

voice mixed up with the pipe of his mate, an' the squeakin' of the halliard blocks, as the six great dippin' lugs and the jib are slowly hoisted. And then, like a ship jumpin' at her cable, the train begins givin' a lot o' little sharp tugs, which presently become one continuous movement, gettin' faster and faster; till bimebye all the wind in the Atlantic behind us is blowin' us straight down the track at twenty knots an hour."

"The wind was right astern, you say, at first?"

"Dead aft," said Pagett.

"But the line wasn't straight, I suppose, the whole sixty miles to Cariaco?"

"That lop-eared line," averred Pagett, "had as many kinks in it as a logline on the quarter-deck after the log's been hauled aboard. As we run round the first on 'em—a sharp curve to the left—we brought the wind on our port beam, d'ye see, and the watch on the roof flattened aft the sheets. Nat'rally the train heeled over to the wind a bit, and for a matter o' three mile or more she run on her lee wheels alone—the weather ones bein' a good two foot above the metals.

"If Pringle carries on much longer like this yer,' says my chum, 'he'll capsize the bally train!'

"Then, for Gawd's sake,' says I, with my head out o' the window, 'let him do it in the nex' hundred yards or leave it alone altogether!'

"My chum cranes his neck out of the window, too, at that. 'I've 'alf a mind,' says he, when he'd taken a look ahead, 'to bloomin' well get out and walk!'

"But we was close hauled on the port tack, you see, with half a gale o' wind roarin' in the sails; and although the wheels on one side of the train—bein' in the air—weren't working at all, we were slippin' along the rail like greased lightning on the others. Before he could so much as get out on the footboard, we began to cross a bridge, and we heard no more about his wantin' to walk.

"Such a God-forsaken lash-up of a bridge you never clapped eyes on! The Venezuelan R'yal Engineers may have meant it for a military trestle bridge: but it was more like a fire-escape ladder laid along a stack of hop-poles than anything else. It was barely a mile long, but it might have been twenty to us, d'you see. For it swayed under the weight o' the train like a acrobat balancin' a chair on his chin; and so damnably heeled over were we, that we could look straight down through the lee windows into the 'igh-class valley o' the shadow o' death underneath. Half-way acrosst, a pack o' forty thousand hell-cats in the shape of a squall o' wind come shriekin' down the valley; and, if Pringle hadn't sung out to ease the sheets, why—the *Canaries* would have roosted there under a few tons of matchwood till the judgment day, that's all. As it was, for a second or two the train tottered on those lee wheels; and though I am not a religious man, you'll understand, I repeated, 'Let dogs delight to bark and bite'—the only hymn I know—right through twice."

"The sentiment did you credit," I observed, "though the words may not be in 'Ancient and

Modern.' By the way, how did they take Pringle's Progress at the railway stations?"

"Like mother's milk," returned Mr. Pagett—"thanks to that there telegraph of his. It was this way, look. Pringle give orders that, whenever we come in sight of a station, all hands inside the carriages was to lie down, and the watch was to flatten theirselves out on the roof so as they couldn't be seen. The first platform—and it was the same with all the rest—was packed chock-a-block with sightseers—and, as we went by, they cheered us like a Queen's birthday mob on Southsea Common. 'What the Hades is that for?' asks a man under the foremost seat o' the carriage. 'What for?' says his pal in the after rack, 'why the mutton-headed sons of Ham think they're cheerin' their own side—that's what for!'"

"What made them think that?" I inquired.

"Pringle's telegraph, of course—what else?" replied Pagett. "He pretended, d'ye see, that it come from the boss o' the fishin' fleet, and it run like this yer: 'Injin busted. Keep line clear. Am bringin' Militia through under sail.'"

On Pagett's hint, and at my instance, a third message was conveyed to the bar from the bench, and the big brown jug presently returned whitewigged.

"It was about six bells in the forenoon watch," resumed Pagett, wiping the froth from his moustache, "that the train run round a big curve, bringin' the wind dead aft again. The sheets was eased right off, and boomed out with boat-looks; and down on the



metals flopped the weather wheels once more. Right before us stretched the track in a fairly straight line for at least four or five mile ; and beyond it was the spur of a low 'ill, lookin' a sort o' purple colour at that distance. I was lyin' on my stummick alongside the look-out on the fo'c'sle—leastways, the roof o' the foremost compartment—when he suddenly says to me, 'Chum,' he says, 'what d'you make o' that there dark speck on the 'illside just where you loses sight o' the line?'

" 'It looks to me,' says I, after a long and careful obsrvation, 'like the 'ead of a black pin stuck into a vi'let pin-cushion.'

" 'Then you oughter be in a blanky blind asylum,' says he, though he'd only that minute discovered what it was himself, mind you. 'Tunnel right ahead!' he roars, springin' to his feet, and hangin' on to the jib 'alliards.

"With that, the midshipman of the watch drops down on the footboard, and crawls aft to report to Pringle in the guard's van, and get's a month's leave stopped for lookin' into the skipper's cabin with his 'at on. There was no panic about Pringle, bless you! He had served himself out with a chart of the line from the bookin'-office before we started ; and he knew all about that tunnel, did Pringle, and was ready to tackle it too.

" 'Watch below!' he sings out, 'stand by to cut the lashin's of the masts when I give the word. Watch on deck! stand by the halliards to lower the sails ; and as soon as the yards touch the deck, mind

you be ready to whip the masts out of her and lay 'em fore and aft along the roof. And remember this, you sons of guns,' he says, shakin' his fist at us, 'the eyes of England and of Pringle are on you!'

"But for the present, Pringle's eyes, at all events, were glued to that distant black speck we were thunderin' towards before the wind, and which was rapidly growin' like a devil's hoof-print at the base of the hill. He was calc'latin' the exact point where he should give the word, d'you see, and I think the sum made his 'ead ache. For if sail was took off the train too soon, she wouldn't carry sufficient way to run through the tunnel; and if not soon enough, the tunnel roof would make splinters and rags of our sail power—to say nothin' of the big spars rippin' up the carriages. I give you my word that it makes me quite jumpy to talk of it even now!"

Mr. Pagett, making a gallant effort to steady himself, winked at me through the bottom of the glass.

"As we raced before the gale, we watched the pin point of light at the far end o' the tunnel quickly growin' bigger, till it looked like a tiny silver hoof-mark stamped on velvet. This showed the tunnel to be so long, d'you see, that Pringle run the train to within four hundred yard of it before ever he sings out, 'Stand by the halliards!' and 'Lower away!'

"Holy Moses! but you should have seen us haulin' those great spars up through the roof. The perspiration pattered on the top of the carriages like a smart shower o' rain, an' our muscles swelled up till,

in some cases, they actually split the skin. For the tail of each man's eye<sup>6</sup> was upon that granite-faced, low-crowned arch, and he nat'rally was anxious to lie down before we reached it, d'ye see.

"Then, with a fiendish rattle an' roar, we were in the bloomin' tunnel. Although the ten men on the roof o' the first carriage worked and swore like fifty blessed Samsons blazin' drunk, they couldn't get the foremast quite unshipped in time; and the crown o' the arch, catchin' the big spar near the top, snapped it in two, and levered the heel o' the mast through the carriage roof as though it had been pastrycook's pie-crust. Two of the bluejackets, who didn't lie down soon enough, were swept off the train, and lay down permanently on the permanent way instead; while a marine inside the compartment came through the roof with the mast—and stopped there. The crews of the remainin' five carriages were smarter, or luckier maybe; and when the train came out o' the tunnel—with a quarter of a mile impetus to spare, mind you—they were on their feet again, and had the masts re-stepped and the sails 'oisted before she showed any signs o' stoppin'."

"But what about the jib-sheet jamming?" I asked.

"I'm a-comin' to the blighter now," said Pagett moodily. "About a mile out o' Cariaco the line runs along the edge of a valley, doubling back at the top, and returning down the other side. What should we see, when we opens out this yer valley, but all the bloomin' *Parrots* roostin' and chatterin' on the

opposite hillside like a lot o' kids waitin' for the pantomjine to begin. When' the train came in view she was bowlin' along on the port tack, heeling well over to the breeze, and runnin', of course, on her lee wheels only. Even at that distance we could hear the cheerin' of our squadron mates; and Pringle, standin' with his legs wide apart on the roof o' the guard's van, takes off his 'at to 'em.

"In order to round the curve and return along the line on the far side of the valley, the train nat'rally had to be put on the other tack, else she'd have run off the metals. Accordin'ly, Pringle begins barkin' his orders—'Ready about. Let fly the jib-sheet. Jib-sheet to wind'ard; now then, you fat-headed—who the—what the——!' He steeplechased over the carriages to where we were fumblin' with the sheet, and cursed hisself hoarse over it, though a baker's dozen o' Pringles couldn't have cleared it in time, mind you. For that lop-eared bit o' rope had twisted itself half-a-dozen times round the hastily mended foremast and twice round one of the lamp chimbleys: it had taken three turns round a door-'andle and hitched itself under a buffer, and where the end o' the blighter had got to nobody could discover, though it was popularly supposed to have lashed itself to one of the axles of the third carriage. Any'ow, the train missed stays, and came to a standstill in the middle o' the curve; and then the *Parrots* came down from their roostin'-place on the 'illside, and jeered.

"Then Pringle addressed his *Canaries* from the

roof o' the foremost carriage. To think, he said, that after fifty-nine miles of high-class seamanship, he should be made the laughin'-stock of a lot o' silly *Parrots*, what had never sailed a train in their something lives! And all because the fingers of half-a-dozen somethin' else Marines, he says, was all thumbs! He said a lot more things, did Pringle, which I've forgot; any'ow, I was redooiced, all on account o' that lop——"

"Yes, yes," I said impatiently, rising from the bench, "so I believe. And there was no concert for the Caniaco garrison after all?"

"There was not," returned Pagett disgustedly. "While we were sailin' across the Parian Isthmus, d'you see, a telegraph had come from the British Gover'ment to the admiral, saying, 'Man in the street here thinks boy too small to be caned. Take cane away'—or words to that effect. So the squadron went a hundred miles into the Atlantic, and blazed away at an old cask instead!"

I handed Mr. Pagett one of my cards. "I have to thank you for a most instructive evening," I said, "and I trust that we may meet again. Although I, also, was serving in the squadron at the time you mention, I never till this evening heard of '*Pringle's Progress*!'"

Mr. Pagett's lower jaw dropped about three holes. "And I thought you was a painter chap!" he murmured reproachfully.

THE MAN AT THE WINDOW;

OR,

THE STRANGE CASE OF WORTHY WHEREAT



## THE MAN AT THE WINDOW

THERE was a crude and amateurish look about the sunset that was irritating. It suggested the idea that for once in a way the great Master had permitted a too ambitious pupil to practise his 'prentice hand upon the clean evening sky. The first uneven wash of saffron and orange was evidently still wet ; for, filtering through it towards the horizon line were big blurs of purple from a fantastic cloud-bank at the top of the picture. Unless the Master himself should speedily come round and tone this glaring daub, plainly the western sky would be irretrievably spoilt, and the sunset of October 17th become a dismal failure.

Yet, in spite of its unloveliness, a Man—whose eyes held the reflection till they glowed like red-hot coals—was watching that sunset for all he was worth.

The seaport of Great Starmouth had endured the blistering heat of a phenomenal September sun as long as it possibly could, and now—in common with the rest of the northern hemisphere—it was beginning



to edge away from it. Chill October seemed by contrast chillier than ever. Hard pressed by the shrieking wind, fallen leaves were scurrying round street corners to hide in doorways and areas till their enemy should have passed: while out in the bleak roadstead yonder sea-horses and gulls contemptuously shook their manes and flapped their wings in its very face. In the garden of a large, time-worn, red-brick building, nestling in a hollow just beyond the town, the leaves were whirling and spinning like mad things—though indeed the gale may not have been the sole cause of their behaviour. For the spirit of madness brooded over the entire place; and above the dancing leaves, at one of the tall windows stood the Man—watching, watching, always intently watching, whilst the invisible artist deepened his tints upon the evening sky.

A sadder spot than the great naval Asylum could not well be imagined. No cemetery can vie in pathos with this burial-place of the living. Here, one by one, from the big home ports, from the harbours of Greater Britain, from English men-of-war in the uttermost corners of the earth, drift the strong, weather-beaten, bronzed, fighting seaman, with the mind of a year-old infant: the officer of exceeding great promise, in whose active brain has been subtly woven the mysterious web of unreason; the brilliant tactician, in whose cunning at dominoes lurk the dregs of former astuteness in the handling of battleships; the engineer, who has forgotten his triple-expansion engines and his dynamoes in the trial trips of a clock-

work mouse: the surgeon, whose skill once saved the life of a sailor Prince, but is powerless to dispel the shadow that has fallen upon his own; the man, in fine, with the intellect of a sheep, and the man possessed of a devil. The expression in the eyes of every mother's son of them (think of the mothers!) spells "Ichabod"; for let the Mischief Maker toy ever so lightly with that delicate mechanism in the skull of Nature's masterpicce, and lo! in the twinkling of an eye is the glory of the whole departed.

It so befell that, upon this memorable afternoon—you shall presently agree with me that I am like to remember it all the days of my life—I was sitting in the officers' ward of the Great Starmouth Asylum. The place is under the care of a Fleet Surgeon and a Surgeon, with the latter of whom—an old China messmate—I had been staying for a couple of days. After a ramble through the men's wards, he had formally introduced me to the officers—all of them so apparently sane that, for some time, I had great difficulty in realising where I was. By degrees however that difficulty vanished.

Now the sanest of wardroom messes is not without its points to the lover of the grotesque. When members of some half-dozen different professions are pitchforked into an iron box, and then set rolling in company for three years or more upon the demoralising deep, the things worth noting with pen and pencil are legion. Consider, then, the infinite possibilities of a similarly constituted mess, where *every one* is insane. Yet, oh! the pity of it.

At a small table near the fire sat a distinguished officer—the organiser of more than one successful expedition—feverishly engaged in writing fairy tales for children. For seven years had his pen been racing thus over countless reams of foolscap, with never a decipherable word—or even letter—in the pile. Standing near him was one who read from a ponderous tome in his tired hands; standing, because—as he deprecatingly explained to me—when the middle third of your body is constructed of Dresden china, it becomes a difficult matter to sit down without cracking yourself. Disposed about the room, talking, reading, playing chess—amusing itself, in short, as rationally as you or I would—was the rest of this marred handiwork of the Creator's. None the less did each man's brain bear somewhere the dull finger-print of the Mischief Maker: and especially marked was it in the case of the Man at the window, who never ceased for one moment to peer with burning eyes into the stormy sunset.

"And who," I asked my host in a whisper, "is the Man at the window?"

"When you were on the China station," he returned, behind his hand, "did you ever hear of the strange case of Worthy Whereat?"

"Of course I did, and long before I went to China—though I have never yet heard the details."

"Very well, then: the Man at the window is Worthy Whereat himself. There is a long-forgotten name at the back of that man's mind, which makes his case peculiarly interesting—so interesting, in fact,

that I have taken the trouble' to write out a clear statement<sup>n</sup> of all I know of the story. Now, look here. I have some dispensing to do, and must leave you for twenty minutes or so. If you care to kill time by reading it, I will fetch you that statement."

I thanked him: and presently he returned with a large notebook, which he placed in my hands. "I've marked the page," he observed; "but first of all let me introduce you to the man himself."

We crossed the room, and the surgeon placed his hand upon the watcher's shoulder. "Whereat," said he pleasantly, "I want you to know an old messmate of mine."

The Man at the window reluctantly turned away from the sunset, and faced us. He was apparently about fifty years of age—perhaps more, with iron-grey hair and the mutton-chop whiskers of a past generation of sailors. His head craned forward from his shoulders in an attitude of expectancy that was evidently born of long years of watching. The face was very pale and stern-set: but it was only afterwards that you recalled all these details. For one's attention was immediately arrested and held by the expression in the glowing eyes—an expression exceedingly difficult to define, but which suggested an intense fear of something or some one forgotten. For the rest, he was attired with scrupulous neatness, and his manner in acknowledging the introduction was that of the courteous, well-bred gentleman.

"I am afraid you must have thought me very rude," he said quietly, as he shook hands, "but I really had no idea that a visitor was in the mess. You see, it is not every night that one can watch the sunset in England, and"—here a cold shudder went down my back, the thing was so weird—"it is out of the sunset that *he* will come! For years—five years, perhaps, or is it twenty? I can't tell—my head has ached with trying to remember who it is. But yes, oh! yes, he will most certainly come one of these nights—one night very soon, I begin to think: and it will be in the glare of the sunset that I shall recognise him, and be able at last to give him a name."

He turned again to the window, as though he had already forgotten our presence: while over the distant tree-tops the tyro was putting the finishing touches to his gorgeous painting upon the sky.

As soon as the doctor had left the room, I settled myself in an easy chair before the fire to read his notes on this eerie case. The patients were becoming drowsy: for like the half-witted, shy things in the woods and fields outside, these poor man-forgotten, God-forsaken lords of creation quickly followed the sun to bed. The dying gale was moaning and sobbing—with remorse, probably, at the mischief it had wrought that day: while a dull booming in the air suggested the suspicion that the uneasy sea couldn't sleep for the same reason. The murmur of conversation gradually ceased: papers fluttered to the floor from listless hands: and the racing pen of the fairy tale writer slackened and finally stopped.

Yet ever at the window, wide awake and terribly in earnest, stood the Man of whom I was reading.

The page marked in the notebook was briefly headed "Case of Worthy Whereat," and dated "R.N. Asylum, Great Starmouth, April 1895"—the month, in fact, after the arrival there of the writer. The statement began as follows:—

"Although it is now unlikely that the mystery surrounding the case of Worthy Whereat will ever be cleared up, yet the facts that have come under my immediate notice are so deeply interesting as to make them seem to me worthy of being placed on record. The story resolves itself naturally into two parts: namely (i) the accident whereby Worthy Whereat lost his reason, and (ii) the strange hallucination which resulted therefrom. It is in this order that I propose to deal with the case.

"Worthy Whereat, late assistant-paymaster-in-charge of H.M. sloop *Peaken*, on the China station, was invalided home and admitted to this Asylum as hopelessly insane in January 1874. The insanity was caused by injuries to the brain, inflicted at Gensan on the eastern coast of Corea on the afternoon of October 17th in the previous year."

October 17th! A sudden thought struck me, and picking up that morning's *Daily Graphic*, which lay at the feet of one of the slumbering patients, I glanced at the date. By a singular coincidence this was the twenty-second anniversary of the accident!

I returned to the notebook. "The cause of the

mishap is entirely unknown. On that point the victim's mind has always been a complete blank, and—so far as could be ascertained at the time—no witness was present. In the hallucination, on the other hand—as you shall presently read—the affair is always overshadowed by a dim, indefinable Presence. Anyhow, the facts that led up to it are these:—

“On the 1st October, 1873, the captain of the ship (a commander whose name I prefer not to mention) discovered a defalcation in the quarterly cash account to the extent of £50. The only course open to him, in consequence, was to place the assistant-paymaster under arrest, and forward a circumstantial letter and application for a court-martial to the Commander-in-Chief at Yokohama; and this he accordingly did.

“The following day the navigating lieutenant—a particular chum of Worthy Whereat's—died suddenly of heart disease. Now, because of this friendship between the pair, and in spite of the latter being under close arrest, the captain requested him on the day of the funeral to assist him in going through the deceased officer's papers. Whereat consented, and the task was performed that afternoon in the empty cabin. Then the captain did a most extraordinary thing. He not only released the prisoner from close arrest, but actually allowed him to go on shore without escort, and without imposing upon him any restrictions whatever! His alleged reason for this grave irregularity was that he feared the close con-

finement, combined with the shock of his chum's death would seriously affect the prisoner's health.

"The next day Worthy Whereat availed himself of this concession, and went ashore alone for a walk. At dusk he was brought off in an unconscious condition by some Coreans, who had discovered him lying upon a hillside with the vertex of his skull fractured.

"The captain, who arrived on board in his galley shortly afterwards, was naturally much upset by this fresh misfortune; and when the surgeon expressed his resolve to attempt the dangerous operation of trepanning, he urged him strongly to desist. 'Let the poor fellow die in peace,' he pleaded, 'or at all events wait till we reach Yokohama and can get further medical assistance.' The doctor, however, very wisely paid no heed to unprofessional advice. The operation was performed, and Worthy Whereat's life thereby saved, though for twenty-two years he has remained—and will continue to remain as long as he lives—a hopeless imbecile.

"So much for the well-known facts of the case: now for Worthy Whereat's extraordinary hallucination. This I will endeavour to give as nearly as possible in his own words as he first told it me.

"One day, near the end of the quarter, the skipper sent for me in his cabin. "Whereat," said he, "I want you to advance me £50 from the chest for service purposes." "Certainly, sir," I replied, "provided, of course, that you give me a receipt for that sum." He did so at once, and I duly handed him over the money



“A few days afterwards he again sent for me. “Oh! Whereat,” he said very pleasantly, “I fancy I must have made out that receipt for the £50 you advanced me on the back of a private note that I wish to refer to. Will you kindly let me look at it again?”

““With pleasure, sir,” I returned: “now that you mention it, I believe there *is* something written on the other side,”—though I knew full well there was not.

“I fetched him the receipt, however: and no sooner was it in his hands than he tore it into minute fragments and threw them out of the port.

““Between ourselves,” he said, turning to me with a smile, “I happen to be infernally hard up—stony broke in fact. I owe money all over the station, and £50 are absolutely necessary to avoid exposure and consequent ruin to my professional prospects. Now in the struggle for existence, my dear Whereat, it is a natural law that the weaker goes to the wall. At the end of the quarter you will be £50 of public money to the bad: no sane man will believe your preposterous story: you have been weak enough to return me my receipt: and therefore you, my dear fellow, will follow that inexorable law of nature, and go to the wall! Good-morning, Mr. Worthy Whereat.”

“I left the cabin with a very crestfallen look, I promise you: yet, once outside, I chuckled softly to myself. For next my skin, and hung round my neck by a fine steel chain, I wore night and day a small waterproof case: and in that case was a certified copy of the receipt, signed by every single member of the wardroom mess!

“Ah! I may have a cracked and worthless headpiece now, doctor: but before he, whose name I have forgotten, came out of the sunset—Worthy Whereat was cunning, damned cunning!

“Now, the navigating lieutenant of the ship—between whom and the captain little love was lost—wrote in his private diary a detailed account of the entire affair. Nor did he omit to mention, you may be sure, the means I had adopted to circumvent the skipper.

“In going through his papers after his death, the skipper and I divided the task as much as possible; and he it was who examined the diary. Whilst doing so, however, he accidentally knocked over a bottle of ink with his elbow, and obliterated so much of the writing that he decided the book was not worth keeping. It was accordingly thrown overboard.

“No one was more surprised than I was the following day, when the skipper temporarily released me from arrest and allowed me to go ashore. I gladly availed myself of the opportunity of getting the much-needed fresh air and exercise, and—no other officers caring to leave the ship in that God-forsaken place—I landed late in the afternoon alone. The skipper, I believe, had gone ashore in the galley an hour or so before, but I am not certain. Anyhow I saw nothing of him.

“On nearing the summit of a low hill at the back of the little port of Gensan, I remember noticing for the first time the peculiar glare of the sunset: and that is about the last thing I do remember. I have since

experienced a vague, indefinable feeling that presently a familiar form came over the crest of the hill towards me straight out of the weird light : a dim sense of our having exchanged words in passing : a misty impression that we continued our respective paths. Then suddenly the red and yellow glare before me split up into thousands of dancing stars : and afterwards—blackness, and pain, and long, aching years spent in trying to recall the name of that passer-by. Yet of one thing I am well assured. Before I go hence and be no more seen, I shall again behold him striding towards me out of the solemn evening light. Then shall I learn of him the nature of the evil that befell me as we passed each other in the long ago—so long ago, alas ! that whereas then I was young and keen-witted, now am I old, and of weak intellect, and exceeding weary of living !’

“ Here then, side by side with the facts, I have recorded the extraordinary fancy of Worthy Whereat’s unhinged mind. His wildly improbable version of the loss of the £50 is in itself sufficient to prove his madness. For the gallant officer, to whom he imputes such abominable treachery, is to-day at the top of his profession : being, indeed, no other than the distinguished—but no, I will not associate his name with so grave a charge, even though it is preferred by an irresponsible lunatic. Moreover—and this I regard as conclusive—when Worthy Whereat was brought on board by the friendly Coreans, no trace was discovered on his person of the carefully guarded receipt, which he was afterwards at

such pains to describe with, the most elaborate detail." •

I closed the notebook, and leant back in my chair to reflect upon its deeply interesting contents. A strange fascination hung about the question—whose was this mysterious Presence that had overshadowed the accident, and for whom the Man at the window had been waiting twenty-two dreary years? The sadness of the place and hour got upon my nerves, and I began to wish for my host's return. The slumbering post-captain in the chair next to mine had both his legs upon the table—lest, being made of wax (as he imagined) the heat of the fire should melt them. The clockwork mouse had finished its trial trips for the day, and lay neglected on its side upon the floor. Propped up against a lofty bookcase was the Dresden china lieutenant—fast asleep: while the writer of fairy tales sat peacefully dreaming of God knows what quaint conceits!

And then suddenly my heart stood still. A piercing yell of triumph from the Man at the window rang through the silent room. "Ah! thrice-damned villain," he roared, "it is YOU, is it? At last—at last you come, with the firelight of hell behind you! Yet, lest your name escape me a second time—see! I will write it in letters of blood upon the sky!"

He stooped; and, breathing upon the frosty window-pane, he rapidly traced with his forefinger the tally that had baffled his shattered memory for twenty-two wasted years. Then, the long, weary watch over, Worthy Whereat the Derelict sank before the tall

western window into the deep rest that passeth all understanding.

Although they scarce comprehended its awful significance, the presence in their midst of the Destroying Angel terrified my unhappy companions greatly. The mad surgeon went instinctively in search of his more sane brother. The post-captain (a possessor of the Humane Society's silver medal) was standing shivering before the fire—regardless of the danger to his wax legs. The engineer cared nothing that he had trodden upon his clockwork mouse—over whose loss he would weep on the morrow; while he of the Dresden china infirmity had so far forgotten it as to sit upon the top of the lofty bookcase. All these grotesquely pathetic details I recalled long afterwards; at the moment, however, my whirling brain had room only for one absorbing incident.

It was this. The great Master of all nature and art had plainly taken in hand at last the painting of the sunset: for the angry purple clouds, the stormy tints of orange and saffron had all been washed out, while in their stead glowed the clear crimson light of great promise. And against this solemn light—before the last breath of Worthy Whereat had faded from the window-pane—I, and I alone, beheld in blood-red letters the long-forgotten, accursed name of the evil-doer.

\* \* \* \* \*

Opening my *Standard* in the train the next morning, whilst *en route* to rejoin my Division, I read with concern, in common with thousands of my country-

men, the obituary notice of a certain great and distinguished naval officer. It is an undoubted fact, in spite of the jeremiads of pessimists, that Englishmen do exist who take a languid interest in the mighty Institution upon which their safety and welfare depend. My fellow-passengers, for instance, were soon discussing the virtues, the talents, and the gallantry of the dead sailor, though I, with a deaf ear turned to their chatter, gazed impassively out of the window at the dreary autumnal landscape.

Yet there were three points in the course of that half-column or so which possessed for me alone of all living men a tremendous significance. Firstly—the deceased had commanded, twenty-two years ago, H.M. sloop *Peaehen* on the China station. Secondly—he had died at the hour of sunset on the previous afternoon. And thirdly—his was the name that I had seen traced upon the window at the same hour by the already stiffening finger of Worthy Whereat.



# UNDER THE HURRICANE DECK

A P. AND O. EPISODE





## UNDER THE HURRICANE DECK

CABIN No. 128 was the aftermost one on the starboard side of that ominously named locality: and, since its occupation on the homeward voyage by a colonial bishop and his chaplain, an odour of sanctity had clung to it which it was thought nothing short of Chinese cookery could dispel. Long before reaching the Nore light-ship, however, on the next outward trip, No. 128 had been fumigated of every breath of piety by the sulphurous language of the pair who then shared it. The subsequent equinoctial gale in the Bay was child's play to the chronic atmospheric disturbance in the cabin under the hurricane deck.

It is a commonplace and—what is not always the same thing—a truism that the greatest effects are often due to the most trivial causes. The deadly feud in No. 128, for instance, on the issue of which three hundred seafaring souls for many days hung breathless, had its origin in some mischievous maggot in the brain of the Company's passage clerk. It

prompted that sorely tried official to allot as cabin mates from among four score first-class passengers a cavalry subaltern and a professor of Egyptology: and, as I shall speedily show you, the allotment produced the not unnatural results which, but for the maggot, he could not have failed to foresee.

The first to arrive at the Royal Albert Dock was the Professor. He was an absent-minded, short-sighted, long-haired, round-shouldered, loose-jointed young giant in spectacles and a dogrobber suit: and he was preceded on board the liner by a string of Lascars bearing a Gladstone bag, two portmanteaus, and a packing case—all labelled "Wanted on the voyage." This excess of cabin luggage moved the chief steward, who introduced him to No. 128, to venture upon a mild remonstrance in the interest of "the other gentleman": for, since the professorial impedimenta fitted into the deck space of the cabin like the pieces of a puzzle, it was plain that "the other gentleman's" dressing-bag would have to go into the hold. But, the Professor obstinately adhering to the red-letter text affixed to his belongings, the chief steward decided to let the absentee fight his own battles—which, he reflected, from the very nature of his calling he should be perfectly competent to do.

Left to himself, the Professor noted that by some oversight one of the two bunks had not yet received its bedding: wherefore he lost no time in proclaiming his annexation of the other by planting thereon his bag, his overcoat, and a ponderous tome on Mummies. Then, since the steamer did not sail till mid-

night and it was still early in the afternoon, he took train to Liverpool Street, and picnicked happily during the remainder of the day in the Egyptian Department of the British Museum.

Returning on board at 11 p.m., the first thing the short-sighted giant did was to bang his forehead and bark his shins against a temporary structure that had been raised in his absence immediately outside the door of 128 : and I think that even the colonial prelate would have condoned the resulting language. For that structure, which bore the oft-repeated, blood-red legend, "Wanted on the voyage," was built up of a packing case, two portmanteaus, and a Gladstone bag, and was surmounted by the well-known standard work on Mummies.

The Professor stepped into the cabin and switched on the electric light. Wedged into the bunk that was still minus its bedding was a long, battered uniform tin case with its owner's name and regiment painted in white letters upon the lid. A helmet case, hat-box, gun-case, dressing-bag, cricket-bat and two tennis-racquets occupied the entire shelf space of the cabin : a bundle of golf clubs and driving whips and another of walking-sticks and umbrellas filled the only two available corners : while an open portmanteau of bulky dimensions completely blocked the narrow strip of standing room in the centre. Between the sheets of the other bunk lay a placidly sleeping youth with the face of a guileless curate.

The Professor shook him none too gently by the shoulder.

"Here, wake up," said he, "you and I had better come to an understanding at once. You don't seem to be aware, to begin with, that you are in my bed."

"It's the first I've heard of it," said the occupant sleepily, but tucking the disarranged bedclothes well round him nevertheless: "I was quite under the impression, don't you know, that the other bunk was yours."

The Professor gasped. "Then why in the devil's name," he asked angrily, "do you suppose I took the trouble to come down here at three o'clock in the afternoon and put my things on this one?"

"Can't imagine," yawned the Cavalryman, for he it was: "as things have turned out it does seem a pity, doesn't it? to have put oneself to all that trouble."

"I must trouble *you* to turn out, anyhow," snapped the Professor, "and there's an end of the business. I've had a long day, and I want to get to sleep."

"So do I, God knows!" complained the Lancer wearily, "only you won't let me. But I'll tell you what, sonny. If you'll give me your word of honour not to collar this bunk while I'm out of it, I don't mind helping you lift my tin case off yours."

"Off mine! Hang it all—off your own, you mean! But in any case I can't sleep in it: there's no bedding."

"That's easily remedied. Ring for some."

"I'll be damned if I do," said the Professor, now fairly roused: "you've appropriated my bed, and the least you can do is to fix me up with another."

The Lancer wearily reached out his hand, and

pressed the electric button on the bulkhead. "I don't mind meeting you half-way, if it comes to that," he said, with the air of a man who is making large concessions.

"It really is too good of you," sneered the Professor, and until the arrival of the steward an ominous silence reigned in No. 128.

The *savant* glared through his glasses at the soldier, while the latter, joining his finger-tips above the counterpane, assumed the benign expression of one who catechises a Sunday school infant. With the advent of the steward, however, the storm broke out afresh.

The Professor's indignant demand that "this person" should be immediately removed from his bed was followed by a peremptory order from the Lancer for the instant expulsion of "that individual" from the cabin. The "individual" thereupon expressed to the steward his conviction that government had no right to grant first-class passages to obviously "steerage people"—which goaded the "person" into asking if the green kennel on the fo'c'sle belonged to a certain long-haired, weak-eyed pup he had seen about the ship. This inquiry, however, he quickly followed up by kicking off the bedclothes and swinging his legs clear of the bunk, for the Professor, having already shed his coat, was now with offensive ostentation rolling up his shirt-sleeves. But at this crisis a compromise was happily effected by the steward, who suggested, firstly, that the *casus belli* should be settled by arbitration of the captain on the morrow; secondly,

that the necessary bedding should be at once procured for the empty bunk; and thirdly, that the Professor's Gladstone bag and one portmanteau should take the place inside the cabin of "the other gentleman's" uniform tin case, cricket bat, and golf clubs. The last two proposals being promptly carried out, the Professor undressed with what dignity he could, and turned in; and until sleep at length overcame them, the belligerents spent an hour or so in an abortive attempt to glare each other out of countenance over the edge of their respective bunks.

It was with a fixed determination to delay his enemy's toilet operations to the utmost that each of the occupants of No. 128 silently arose the following morning, and so successful were their efforts that breakfast was half over before they entered the saloon by different doors. Never were engineers more successfully hoist with their own petard, for the only seats by this time unappropriated for the voyage were two immediately facing each other at the same table. The Professor, whose cumbersome baggage, it transpired, contained nothing but books, and who was consequently clad in the same dogrobber suit and linen of the previous day, was exasperated to the last degree by the proximity and conduct of his enemy. For the Cavalryman, in immaculate pink shirtings and creaseless summer suit, after toying a few moments with his tea and toast, leaned back in his chair and began a deliberate and supercilious survey of his *vis-à-vis* through an eyeglass. Now the Professor—unlike his tormentor, who invariably described himself

at that hour as feeling 'chippy'—was a hearty breakfast eater, and it was therefore with a gratified sense of "something attempted, something done," that the soldier presently observed him savagely push aside an untasted omelet, and stalk out of the saloon.

As the little world of "those who go down to the sea in ships" gradually dwindles to that grey disc of the globe's surface which is bounded by the horizon, so in inverse ratio do the trivialities of life swell into events of absorbing interest. Before lunch-time every soul in the ship knew of the strained relations existing between the Professor and the Lancer—each of whom, as far apart as possible, and surrounded by sympathetic strangers, had spent the forenoon in a recital of his wrongs; and by tea-time society had resolved itself into two opposing factions, the Educational and the Military. An Indian judge with a liver and the voice of a street hawker was the undisputed champion of the former, while the leadership of the latter seemed naturally to devolve upon a choleric post-captain in the Royal Navy. So high did feeling run between the two parties, that when, in the smoking-room at sherry and bitters time, the captain called for orange, the judge, who regarded angostura as deadly poison, nevertheless felt himself in honour bound to drink it.

In the cabin under the hurricane deck, meanwhile, the Lancer's soldier servant was laying out his master's things for dinner. Now, if he had been a private of the Royal Marines instead of a cavalry recruit on his first voyage, he would have known



better than to place a new pair of patent leather Wellingtons inside the little cupboard beneath the wash-hand basin. This act, moreover, was the less excusable, in that he had first to remove the tin save-all designed to receive the dirty water. Nevertheless, the dimensions of No. 128 being roughly those of a four-wheeler, and the impossibility of placing old heads on young shoulders being a prehistoric axiom, Private Hellforleather cannot be held altogether responsible for the resulting catastrophe.

By a process which the Professor himself called diplomacy and the Lancer low cunning, the former got first use of the basin that evening ; and, having performed his ablutions with a due regard to the splashing of his enemy's highly-glazed shirt-front, he drew forth the plug, and unwittingly projected the soapy water into the fifty-shilling dress boots. Had their owner confined himself to the burst of profanity with which, five minutes later, he plucked them from their retreat, all might yet have been well. But when he presently proceeded to accuse the Professor of malice aforethought in deliberately substituting the boots for the save-all, all possibility of an amicable settlement was clearly at an end. In less than two minutes the scene resembled a gladiatorial combat in a wrecked lost property office : but it was considerably longer ere the judge and the post-captain, who shared the next cabin, succeeded in separating and pacifying the combatants.

Then on the morrow came the gale in the Bay, which, unlike the proverbial ill wind, blew good to

two persons at least. For, as the sea began to rise beneath its influence, both soldier and *savant* collapsed in distant corners of the saloon, and a day's armistice between them was tacitly understood to have been declared. Hour by hour the rolling and pitching of the ship increased, until to all appearances the wretched pair hadn't a single kick left in them. But when, very betimes that evening and within a few minutes of one another, they crawled limply to bed, it was soon made plain to each that considerable life yet lurked in his groaning enemy. Once more "cabin'd, cribb'd, confined" in their two hundred and seventy cubic feet of accommodation under the hurricane deck, and of necessity the campaign quickly drew to a crisis.

Just as the Lancer had succeeded, after many contortions, in wedging his back against the bulkhead and his knees against the edge of the bunk, the ship gave a tremendous lurch, and the professorial Gladstone bag, slipping from the shelf overhead, shot its contents all over him. As they consisted mainly of half-a-dozen heavy, sharp-edged volumes on the Pyramids, the soldier resented their fall exceedingly, and, sitting up in bed, he told the Professor so with military directness. The hold, he added savagely, as he rubbed his funnybone, was the proper place for heavy baggage.

"Then you ought to keep your infernal 'side' down there," retorted the Professor: "you have enough of it for a whole regi—Holy Moses! Are you travelling in the haberdashery line, or what?"

With the next roll of the ship an avalanche of pink shirtings, striped flannel trouserings, rainbow-hued pyjama suitings, and dainty washing waistcoats had descended upon him from the enemy's territory. The Professor scornfully crumpled them all on to the deck.

"Here, steady on with those new things," expostulated their owner sharply, "they haven't been worn yet—you won't catch anything from them, you know. And that's more than you could say for these beastly old second-hand tomes of yours."

He was gingerly picking up the "Pyramids" volume by volume between his finger and thumb, and dropping them over the side of the bunk.

"I say, anyhow," returned the Professor with determination, as he got out of bed, "that I'm not going to lie still and allow a gilded, wooden-headed popinjay of a horse-soldier to mishandle valuable Egyptological works."

In an instant the "popinjay" was out of his bunk also, and, a big sea striking the ship at the time, the two men collapsed and became hopelessly involved with each other, the haberdashery, and the "Pyramids" in the narrow space between the bunks. The Professor, who had inadvertently sat down in his pyjamas upon one of his enemy's jack spurs that had rolled out of some corner or other, kept announcing the fact at the top of his voice and in anything but academical periods: for, the Lancer having fallen across him, he was unable to extricate himself from his very trying position. But the soldier, in spite of a corner of

Vol. III. of the "Pyramids" being jammed against his liver, stoically refused to budge an inch—accounting physical anguish as bagatelle in his exultation over his still more suffering foe. And then something happened—trivial enough in itself, but destined to completely change the existing state of things.

Lying face upwards on one of the pink shirts in the midst of the chaos lay a cabinet photograph of an undoubtedly pretty girl. Equally undoubtedly was it the counterfeit presentment of a born coquette. On a sudden it caught the eye of the Lancer, who staggering to his feet, hastily snatched it from its blushing resting-place. Whereupon the Professor ceased blaspheming, and removed himself tenderly from the spur.

"Thank you," he said, observing the photograph in his adversary's hands, "I'll trouble you for that. It belongs to me."

The Lancer stared at him with unfeigned astonishment. "Well, I'm damned!" he ejaculated: "I suppose you'll lay claim to my sword and revolver next!"

The Professor seemed somewhat taken aback in his turn. "Don't be an ass!" he snapped: "I don't care twopence about your beastly trade implements. All I want is that photograph of my young woman."

"Your young wo—good Lord!" The Lancer gasped. Then he drew himself up to his full height, and regarded the Professor haughtily through his half-closed eyelids. "You are evidently unaware,"

he said stiffly, "that I have the honour to be—well, practically engaged to that 'young woman.'"

"How can you have the audacity to stand there and tell me a fairy tale like that," thundered the Professor, "when to all intents and purposes the young lady is my *fiancée*?"

The other sighed wearily. "Oh! look here," he said, "that is all ghastly tommy-rot—it's clearly a case of mistaken identity. Perhaps this will convince you that the photograph is mine."

His sunburnt face turned a thought redder as he held out the portrait with its back towards the Professor. For it bore the legend in perpendicular, school-girl characters three-quarters of an inch long, "To Bertie, with fondest love from Flossie." Herbert was the Lancer's baptismal tally.

The Professor peered incredulously at the inscription for some moments, and then began a hurried search between the leaves of the six volumes that lay mixed up with the Lancer's shirts upon the deck. Presently he found what he wanted, and thrust it triumphantly under his rival's nose. It was a facsimile of the photograph held by "Bertie"!

"Turn it over," ordered that warrior stonily. With an exceeding cynical smile the Professor obeyed, and lo! on the back, in the same early English perpendicular style was scrawled, "With Flossie's fondest love to Teddy"—Teddy being the name by which the Professor was known to his inner circle of acquaintance.

For the space of a full minute the two men silently

faced one another, each with his photograph in his hand. Then the Professor spoke.

"We'll send 'em back to her from Gib, I suppose," was his moody suggestion.

"With Teddy's and Bertie's united and fondest love," supplemented the Lancer bitterly.

Then their eyes met, shifted uneasily, travelled round the limited area of No. 128, and met again. The Professor sniggered foolishly, the Lancer's curate-like countenance became more inanely bland each second; until at last they fell back on their respective bunks with peals of hysterical laughter.

\* \* \* \* \*

"I'd back the weakest woman on God's earth," observed the Professor five minutes later, as he carefully picked up and sorted the Lancer's pink shirts, "against a whole dynasty of Pharaohs for duplicity. She took her dying oath I was the only man outside her family who had ever kissed her!"

"Did she!" said the Lancer with emphasis. "Well, I certainly don't belong to her bally family myself, and yet"—he finished repacking the work on the Pyramids into the Gladstone bag before he added—"but anyhow, I won't give the girl away."

"This is indeed magnanimity," murmured the Professor.

"After all, you know," went on the other sententially, when they were once more settled in their bunks, "there are just as good fish in the sea as ever came out of it."

"Every bit as good," assented the philosophical

Professor. "By the bye, I should like to be allowed to retract that ill-considered remark of mine to the steward *re* steerage passengers."

"Don't mention it, sonny. My reference to the dog-kennel on the fo'c'sle was in devilish bad taste, now I come to think of it. I apologise."

"Oh! don't worry about that, old man: I didn't mind. Pleasant dreams to you!"

"Then they mustn't be about *her*," returned the Lancer ungallantly and with conviction.

The Professor laughed softly. "She's not likely to be dreaming about us, anyway," he remarked cynically: "you may take your oath she's busy enough by this time making tomfools of Algy and Freddy."

"D——n!" said the Lancer viciously between his teeth.

"Amen," returned the Professor.

And thereafter silence reigned in the cabin under the hurricane deck.

# LACHRYMAE CHRISTI





## LACHRYMAE CHRISTI

THERE was nothing remarkable at first sight in the small oblong strip of white sand in the heart of the West African jungle. Yet for two persons, a man and a woman, who were standing in the glow of the tropic sunset, peering down at its level surface, it seemed to possess considerable fascination. The man, a tall, gaunt Englishman, in a pith helmet and white drill suit, was barely eight-and-thirty; yet—by reason of the bent shoulders, the iron-grey hair, the tired look in the eyes that had blinked for years in the hot sunshine, and the—well, other things—one would have judged him to be fifty. His companion was a graceful, sweet-faced woman of six-and-twenty summers, with the tint of the English wild rose lingering in her cheeks. It is a well-known fact that there are no original similes left wherewith the artist in printer's ink may describe a pretty woman. The novelist who compared his heroine's eyes to those of a shot partridge hit upon the very last of them. Therefore, and because it is no more

than the truth, you will forgive me for mentioning that my heroine had hair of spun gold, eyes the tint of the shadowy Mediterranean under summer clouds, and teeth like a double row of pearls for regularity and whiteness. Round one dainty sleeve was bound the badge of the Red Cross, and, for the rest, she was wearing the picturesque blue, white, and scarlet uniform of a nursing sister of the Royal Navy.

On three sides of the tiny clearing the jungle spread uninterruptedly for miles, but on the fourth it ended abruptly after a hundred yards or so in a narrow belt of cultivation. Along the far edge of this belt, between the maize fields and a mud-banked, reed-fringed river, straggled a handful of native huts and European bungalows, and over the most pretentious of the latter drooped the Union Jack. For this was the English Consulate, and the gaunt man with the tired eyes talking to the lady in the jungle was the consul. On the verandah were two more nurses, looking across the river bar, beyond which a hospital ship and half-a-dozen men-of-war were rolling their nettings under in the long, glassy swell. A few days before a warlike expedition had been landed from this squadron "for the punishment of (native) wickedness and vice," and was engaged at the present moment in cutting its way through the jungle towards the bloody capital. For obvious reasons I cannot tell you that city's name, but the scene of my story was officially termed the "Base of Operations."

"And this," the consul was saying, with a flourish of his stick and the pride of a man showing

the lions of the neighbourhood, "is our European cemetery."

The sister again noted the depressing gloom of the jungle, the entire lack of wooden cross or tombstone, the land-crabs stirring in the sand, and shuddered.

"Oh! Mr. Sieveking," she exclaimed, "how dreadful! Of course it cannot really matter what becomes of one's body after death, but I should *not* like the thought of being buried here. And what are all those round black things sticking out of the sand? Why," she stooped down and examined one at her feet, "they're beer bottles!"

The smooth, white surface of the parallelogram was studded with rows of these inverted empties, well embedded in the sand, like the pips on a gigantic domino.

"Whisky bottles, for the most part," corrected the consul bitterly, "though that is a matter of detail. But the idea was my own, and one, I flatter myself, that possesses at least the merit of originality. You see it was this way, sister. The sand is so loose that neither stone nor wooden cross will stand upright; but I couldn't bear the thought of all these poor dev—poor fellows, I mean, lying here like a lot of executed criminals without a tally among them to tell t'other from which. So—please don't laugh—I sent home for a packet of black-edged note-paper, wrote the circumstances of each man's death (as well as I could remember them) with an appropriate text on half-sheets, corked them up in bottles, and stuck them where you see them now."

"But how did you manage to identify the graves?"

The consul thrust his stick into the sand until the ferrule struck with a dull thud upon a coffin lid.

"I located them by taking soundings," he said, "but for the rest I had to trust to memory and guesswork, adapting the nature of the bottle, as far as possible, to the nationality of the deceased."

"I'm afraid I don't quite follow you."

"The grave in the left-hand corner yonder," explained the consul, "is poor Ollendorf's, my late German colleague. His epitaph is in a bottle that once contained lager. The one next to it is a west countryman's. He was in the Houssa Police, and I've quite forgotten his name; anyhow, he has a text at his head, and it's in a Plymouth gin bottle. The one with the Jamieson label just showing above the sand has a few lines inside from the metrical version of the Psalms. Dear old Donald Macleod, a trader chum of mine, is underneath—and so on, and so on. God knows, Miss Mainwaring, that I mean no irreverence. Some, no doubt, have got their wrong tallies, but I've done my best for them, and no one else ever comes near the place." And then, as if he were half-ashamed of his weakness, he added, "They've most of 'em got women-folk over in Europe, don't you know."

Although she still continued to gaze at the sand, the trained hospital nurse was only too conscious of the man's tremulous hands, his weak, twitching mouth, and the dull look in the eyes that was not all due to the sun-glare; and well enough did she

comprehend their terrible import. The bottles themselves, indeed, told her a far more pitiable tale than any of those set forth upon their black-edged, cream-laid contents. After a moment's pause she looked up, and the gentle eyes were glistening with unshed tears.

"Do you know," she said softly, "I think it was very nice of you to take all that trouble."

"I am glad you think so," he returned wistfully, with the least possible accent on the "you": and for an instant his eyes sought the beautiful face which he was madly beginning to hope might be the means, even at the eleventh hour, of working his salvation. For Horace Sieveking, wrangler, linguist, brilliant administrator and diplomatist, had in these latter days added to his long list of attainments that of confirmed drunkard. The so-called town at the mouth of the muddy river was as unimportant as it was unhealthy; and the authorities, to whom the consul's vice was well known, were mercifully resolved to leave the matter of his dismissal to the climate. On the departure of the expedition he had courteously placed the consulate at the disposal of the nursing sisters, retiring himself meanwhile to an empty and less commodious bungalow in the "town." The ladies, being very sea-sick, thankfully availed themselves of the invitation, until such time as the "cases" should begin to arrive from the front, and their services be required. From the moment the lonely, broken-down exile encountered Hilda Mainwaring's sweet glance of pity, he was seized with a burning desire to recover

something of his lost manhood. To this end he had, by an almost superhuman effort of will, abstained from alcohol for three whole days and nights; with the natural result, in the case of so hard a drinker, that he was now on the verge of delirium tremens.

"By the way," he said, turning the conversation from the subject of himself and his acts, "I ought to tell you the story of the first burial that took place here. It was that of a private of Marines serving in a gunboat on the coast, whose shipmates, finding, as I said, that nothing would remain upright in the loose sand, cast about for some other means of marking the grave. Some one suggested shells. So, after collecting a sufficient number from the beach, they arranged them upon the grave in the form of the man's name—which happened to be E. FROST."

"That was rather a pretty idea," said the sister. "Please don't imagine for one moment, Mr. Sieveking, that I wish to disparage your own work of kindness, but, of the two, don't you think that sea-shells are more appropriate than——?"

"I do think so, Miss Mainwaring," he returned deferentially, "but—well, hear the sequel. When the men came on the morrow to look at the grave, they found to their great indignation that the name had been changed to F. TOZER. After every white man in the town—there are only three of us!—had conclusively proved his innocence of the outrage, it was discovered that the shells had rearranged themselves!"

"The shells?"

"Yes—or, rather, the live fish inside them."

Sister Hilda laughed softly. "Mr. Sieveking," said she, "you should tell that tale to the gallant Marines themselves on their return from the front. But why Tozer any more than Jones or Smith?"

"That is what puzzled the dead man's comrades, until they looked up his papers, and found that F. Tozer was his real name, E. Frost being the assumed one under which he had enlisted!"

"No wonder shell-fish are said to be good for the brain," commented Hilda, still laughing. "I had no idea till now that they were so marvellously intelligent!"

"Nor I," said the consul lightly. "But you will allow, Miss Mainwaring, that if bottles are less poetical than sea-shells, they are at all events more stable."

"And yet"—there was infinite compassion in the woman's voice—"I have known the former to change a living man more completely than the shells in your story changed a dead one's name."

Then, of a sudden there swept over her a great wave of pity for this wrecked manhood, which had shown at one time such brilliant promise, and which could feel as tenderly as a woman for the lonely dead. "Oh! Mr. Sieveking," she said, in her earnestness laying her hand upon his sleeve, "please forgive me if I seem impertinent, and remember only that I am a professional nurse of suffering humanity, trained in a great London hospital. I have seen—ah! how much I have seen of that terrible malady you are



so manfully struggling against, and from the bottom of my heart I pity you. Because your guests are ladies and you are a gentleman, you are making a gallant effort to resist a frightful craving; and, perhaps, we nurses, with our hospital ward experiences, can appreciate the cost of that effort better than most women. But, oh! why not make our visit the turning-point in your career? It would at least be"—here she smiled through her gathering tears—"a graceful tribute to the charms and influence for good of our sex. In a few hours more we must return to our duties, and you will be freed from the restraint of our presence. And then, Mr. Sieveking, you must continue for your own sake the struggle you have begun for ours, and I pray the God of all battles to give you strength to win this one."

"As long as you do that, Miss Mainwaring," said the consul, baring his head, "be sure that all the devils in hell would have no chance against me. I shall remember and cherish your sweet words till my dying day." And lifting the fingers, which had touched his sleeve, he reverently stooped and kissed them.

Why, O Christ! had this woman been allowed to cross his lonely path years too late, and just as he was succeeding in drinking himself into a blessed forgetfulness of the might have been?

Unlike the happier dead at his feet, he had no "women-folk over in Europe"—or anywhere else, for that matter; and those he had known best were not of the ministering angel class. Yet, was it too late after all? Supposing—Sieveking smiled grimly at

the bare idea—but supposing such an astounding miracle were worked as his reformation, would she, with her professional experience of dipsomania, entertain for one moment the thought of casting in her lot with his? Would it be right to allow her, even if she were willing, to sacrifice herself for his salvation? No; a thousand times no! And yet—— He trembled so exceedingly at the mere possibility of such rapture, that Hilda grew alarmed.

“The sun has set some time,” she said, “and you are feeling chilly, Mr. Sieveking. Hadn’t we better be getting back?”

But he still lingered, leaning heavily upon his stick. “You are very fond of your profession, are you not, Miss Mainwaring?” he asked.

“Oh! I am simply devoted to the work,” she answered enthusiastically.

“Then nothing, I suppose”—he was tracing patterns in the sand now with his stick—“would ever induce you to give it up?”

“Only one thing,” she said, in a low voice, after a moment’s hesitation.

He looked up quickly. The wild-rose tint in her cheeks had deepened—a reflection of the sunset after-glow, perhaps, or—— Ah! How madly his heart beat at that second thought.

“And that is?” he whispered.

“Mr. Sieveking, you must congratulate me. When we get home to England—I beg your pardon?”

“Nothing, nothing. Yes—when you get home to England?”

"I—I am going to be married."

The evening had grown confoundedly dark and cold all of a sudden! What the devil was the matter with it?

"I sincerely trust that you will be very happy," murmured the consul politely. "But you are right, Miss Mainwaring, we must be going. The sun has set, and black night will soon overtake us—very soon indeed now!"

\* \* \* \* \*

One of the "cases" brought back to the coast by the successful expedition was that of a midshipman with an injured leg. A detached clot of blood in a vein of that member may, as long as it remains there, be a small matter; but in the heart or brain, whither the shaking of a passing footstep may speed it, it means instant death. The boy had been carried in the first instance to the consulate, and there the principal medical officer decided to leave him, deeming the possibility of malarial fever preferable to the certainty of a fatal shaking on shipboard. Vigilant nursing for a few weeks was all the case needed, said the P.M.O., glancing over his spectacles at the nursing staff. Without an instant's hesitation Sister Hilda volunteered to remain behind with the patient. No one was more keenly alive to the dangers of that pestilential spot—no one probably had stronger reasons for desiring a speedy return to England. But Hilda's standard of duty was a high one, and she had used no feminine exaggeration of speech when she had told Sieveking that evening in the jungle that she was devoted to her work.

So the squadron dispersed, and the hospital ship with her freight of sick and wounded went home minus a nursing sister. Again the consul withdrew without a murmur to the ramshackle bungalow in the "town," while his roomy bachelor quarters were given up to Hilda, her patient, and a native woman attendant. He ransacked the district for fruit, fish, and game, and every morning Hilda found a bouquet of freshly-picked flowers in the verandah. In the sweltering afternoons, with his craving for drink rending and tearing him like a legion of devils, he would watch by the sick boy's bedside and amuse him with stories of the weary jungle life, in order that the worn-out sister might get an hour or two's much-needed sleep. And sometimes, in the saffron and orange afterglow of the sunset, or in the golden light of the great tropic moon, he would stand on the verandah for a brief five minutes, drinking in the tones of a voice which reminded him of a bell heard across the summer sea.

But these glimpses of heaven the racked sinner allowed himself but seldom; for they were invariably followed by paroxysms of tears and remorse upon the lonely beach for the sweet companionship and that other life which might have been his.

Now, about a week after the departure of the squadron from that part of the coast, trouble arose at a certain port within the consular jurisdiction, which demanded Sieveking's immediate presence. In spite of his moral degradation in one direction, his devotion to duty's call was as unflinching as that of Hilda

herself. The thought of leaving her practically alone for a whole fortnight in that land of battle, murder, and sudden death nearly drove him out of his mind ; yet he set about his preparations for departure without a moment's wavering.

Although he apprehended no definite danger, he took special measures to ensure the safety of the consulate and its inmates during his absence ; and to that end he solemnly committed them to the care of the German vice-consul, a callow youth in goggles, but the only other white man for the moment in the place.

The night before his departure Hilda and he stood on the verandah in the moonlight. "By the time you return, Mr. Sieveking," she was saying, "my patient ought to be quite convalescent and able to travel. We shall then have no need to trespass any longer on your generous hospitality."

The consul sighed. "You will return," he said, "to all that makes life worth living—civilisation, refined society, friendship, and"—his voice trembled—"love. I, on the other hand—bah !" He broke off with a shudder. He had made his bed, and he must lie on it without whining like a beaten cur.

But she turned her beautiful face to his, the triumph of conquest shining in her eyes ; and her voice, though scarce above a whisper, rang like a silver clarion in his ears.

"You, too, will some day return to the world—to honour, and fame, and friends, and—best of all—the love of a true woman. Yet here at your post the good

fight must first be fought out to the bitter end, and surely each day is bringing you nearer to victory!"

"Then, to you, Sister Hilda, my guardian angel, I shall owe my salvation. For it was your hand which stayed me as I tottered on the brink of the precipice, and which has daily drawn me farther back from destruction."

For a second time he raised her fingers to his lips, and, with a heart too full for further words, quitted the consulate.

Twelve glaring, steaming, wicked West Coast days had crawled by, when Sieveking sprang from the deck of the crazy coaster upon the rotting pier beneath the consulate. Owing to his admirable tact and diplomacy, his mission had been crowned with signal success, and he was home again two days earlier at least than he had anticipated. Yet, try as he would to feel elated, his heart lay like lead within him, and he found himself shunning the gaze of the German vice-consul, who, goggles and all, had come to meet him.

"'Evening, Richter," he said, with a transparent assumption of carelessness that a child would have seen through, "er—what a beautiful day we've had!"

Seeing that they had had three hundred and sixty-four precisely similar days in the last twelve months, the Teuton merely groaned.

"All well up yonder?" Sieveking yawned ostentatiously behind his hand.

"All is well—mit der yoong boy."

Something in his voice made the other look up,

"And Sister Hilda?" he asked sharply, his assumed indifference gone in a moment.

"Die Fräulein——" began the German, and then stopped. "Mein Gott!" he went on, turning aside. "I cannot tell him."

"Speak out, you damned fool," shouted Sieveking, "and don't stand there muttering like a prize idiot, for God's sake! What of—her?"

"She died of the fever last night. I haf from her without-benefit-of-clergy-funeral joost arrived."

For one moment Sieveking dully wondered whether electrically executed criminals, whose cases have been bungled, ever feel as he did then. The next instant he was shaking the stolid German by the scruff of the neck as a terrier does a rat.

"You thick-headed, useless ullage," he hissed; "you let her die—that angel who came into this hell to save—ah! no, Richter, you did your best, I know; I don't mean what I'm saying." He buried his face in his hands.

"Where have you laid her?" he asked presently.

"Glose unter die balings in der nord gorner," said the vice-consul gently.

In the solemn evening hour, when the insect murmur and the bird music of the tropical forest were hushed, and the sunset blaze had died to a crimson glow behind the undergrowth, Sieveking the consul lay face downwards upon the white sand in the little cemetery. A deep sob every now and then shook the gaunt frame, but so still did he lie meanwhile, and for so long a time, that the little bright-eyed lizards ran

to and fro across him without fear. At length he rose, and the man of eight-and-thirty, who had of late begun to renew his youth, again looked fifty.

But there were signs of a fixed purpose in the swollen eyes and in the firm, quick step with which he left the cemetery. The little coaster, wherein he had arrived that afternoon, sailed at midnight on her return trip; and, in spite of his utter weariness of mind and body, the consul went with her. For, during the time he had lain upon the sand, his stricken brain had conceived an idea which he was feverishly anxious to put into execution. On his arrival next evening at his destination he sought out a certain missionary clergyman of the Church of England—the only one in many hundred square miles—and preferred to him a strange request. So strange was it, and so trivial the object begged for—he would moreover give no reason for his conduct—that the good minister set him down as hopelessly insane. Nevertheless he furnished him with his heart's desire, and Sieveking bore it back to the consulate with as much reverence and care as though it had been some priceless relic.

His first act on reaching home was to write on half a sheet of his black-edged note-paper the simple name HILDA, with the date of her death and the text—

*"Her sun is gone down while it was yet day."*

Then he tenderly unwrapped the thing he had journeyed so far to obtain, and lo! it was a small, empty black bottle, labelled "Lachrymae Christi" (Tears of Christ), which had held the sacramental wine. Surely, reasoned the madman, such a bottle



could never profane the resting-place of his beloved, and bottles, he was as firmly convinced as ever, were the best means of marking out his jungle cemetery. So he placed his tear-blotted epitaph where the "Tears of Christ" had been, carefully sealing it up ; and in the mellow African moonlight, when the silence of the forest was profound, he set it in the sand at the head of the sleeping woman, who for a few brief weeks had saved him from himself.

And with it he buried all hope of salvation in this life. For on the morrow Sieveking the consul was too drunk to rise from his bed.

## THE DEADLY NIGHTSHADE



## THE DEADLY NIGHTSHADE

BACK in his chrysalis stage—before, that is to say, the candidate grub had been hatched by the Civil Service Commissioners into a scarlet and golden butterfly subaltern—he was plain (with the accent on the plain) John Green. Now, when one's neighbour is cursed with as many namesakes as a tomcat or a jackass, it becomes clearly part of one's duty to one's neighbour to pluck him forth from this *bourgeoise* obscurity, and give him a leg-up in the shape of some less handicapping tally. Casting about for a suitable synonym, men presently perceived three things, to wit—the colour of his patronymic, the similitude of his nose-tip to a crimson berry, and his pleasing habit of practising upon the fiddle in the night season. On the day that this combination first struck the mess wag, plain John Green (for all social purposes) died : and in his stead was born—the Deadly Nightshade.

The upspringing of the Poisonous Plant—he had thenceforward divers aliases—was in this wise : of his withering, alas ! you shall also afterwards learn.

On a certain summer's evening, the officers of the great sea regiment were smoking after dinner beneath the plane trees outside their mess. The regiment, I grieve to say, hath fallen much of late into the evil fashion of matrimony: but at the time of the upspringing of the Deadly Nightshade, other and better customs prevailed, and the full complement of five dining members was present. Lest, in a corps eighteen thousand strong, this may seem a small proportion of officers at head-quarters, let me hasten to explain that the great Vampire of the sea—which is continually employed in sucking the life out of barracks—had been abnormally voracious that summer. To the life of so dreadful a glutton one would look for a speedy end: but the sea soldiers—whose proud privilege it is to furnish themselves forth as an article of the monster's diet, and who can gauge its swallowing capacity to a man—wag their heads knowingly, and light their pipes out of smoking hours while they may.

The Major—but recently cast ashore after many days and nights spent Jonahwise in its belly, and at present under the mellow influence of the Regent's port—was employed in tracing with his forefinger a Service letter upon the gnat-blurred evening air. As far as I can recollect at this distant date, it was addressed to the captain of his late ship, and embodied a long-standing grievance against the gunnery lieutenant. "If I had been where I was not," he dictated, "I might certainly have done what he didn't. But, sir, he not only put words into my mouth which I never uttered, but he

placed upon them a construction that I never intended. And what in Gehenna is *that* ?”

His sympathetic audience gathered that the last sentence referred less to the gunnery lieutenant's libel than to a procession which debouched at that moment through the main archway on to the empty parade. This consisted of a donkey cart, piled high with second-hand furniture, driven by a railway outside porter, and preceded by a weird person in an apparently home-made hat and prehistoric dogrobber suit, who nursed tenderly under one arm the shabbiest of violin cases. Arrived at the mess entrance, the latter gravely raised the home-made hat to the quintet, and discovered beneath it a red-haired, flattened head, which suggested the idea that it had been tapped with a mallet while hot.

“Oh !” said he, in a voice that wanted sand-papering, “good-evening. My name is Green, and—er—I've come to join.”

In such fashion sprang up before their eyes that young and tender shoot—the Deadly Nightshade.

The group under the trees was smitten dumb with dismay. This animated scarecrow, then, was their brother officer ! The Senior Subaltern was the first to recover his speech—though its effect was inadvertently discounted by a prefatory hiccup.

“I say, Jackson,” he called through the open ante-room window to the head mess waiter, “Master Green has come to stay with us. See that his sheets are properly aired, will you ? and that a hot-water bottle is placed in his bed !” By which it would appear that

the Senior Subaltern had looked upon another bottle when it was red.

Not a muscle of the Deadly Nightshade's face moved. "Thank you," he said simply—noting, maybe, that the other's centre of gravity seemed to be set dangerously high in his body—"it is good of you to think of it. I have been warned that a Service mess is sometimes a damp place."

The Senior Subaltern was understood to murmur his conviction that something or some one was "dam-cheek," and the other four split a smile between them. This does not, when you come to consider it, leave much to go round. Yet there was just enough of it on the face of each for the Deadly Nightshade to swear by, and he gathered therefrom that he was held to have scored.

The railway outside porter removed the second-hand furniture from his donkey cart to the parade, whence it was presently transferred to an adjacent passage for the night. Had its owner been embarking upon a campaign, it could scarcely have been more ideally scanty: had he been returning from one, it could not well have been worse for wear. A battered camp bedstead, that served by day as—save the mark!—an easy chair. An old-fashioned, travel-stained uniform tin case and portmanteau. A cheap chest of drawers that was painted, and a cheaper zinc bath that wasn't. A candlebox full of books: a flyblown picture or two: a strip of threadbare stair carpet, apparently: an old naval sword—and I think the catalogue of the Deadly Nightshade's effects is complete.

It had looked mean enough, God knows! piled pyramid-wise upon the cart: but spread out upon the white parade before the scornful eyes of the Senior Subaltern, the inanimate baggage seemed to shrink with very shame. Even its ill-dressed proprietor appeared to realise its shabbiness for the first time, and a troubled look came into his eyes.

"They belonged—most of them," he explained apologetically, indicating the rubbish heap, "to my old dad, and it seemed a pity not to make use of them. He was in the Service himself, you see, and—and," he added brokenly, "has had rather a rough time of it since he left, don't you know."

"Was he—may one be permitted to inquire," asked the Senior Subaltern with an elaborate assumption of interest, "in the Condemned Store Department?" Of the species bounder, I regret to say, was this especial Senior Subaltern.

Altogether an impossible person to consort with, one had deemed the Deadly Nightshade: yet at the taunt there came something of dignity into his attitude and expression.

"My father," he returned slowly, and with much distinctness, "chances to be one of those with whom you, doubtless, would have little sympathy. He is, in point of fact, a—gentleman."

The Senior Subaltern snorted with rage. "You infernal young cub!" he shouted, gripping the collar of the dogrobber suit, "your education in military etiquette will have to be taken in hand at once!"

The Major laid the forefinger, with which he had



written his aerial letter, upon the scarlet sleeve of the youth's mess jacket. "Not to-night," he said quietly: "before beginning his military training, the boy must have the traditional forty-eight hours to sling his hammock, you know." The Major, I have already observed, had but lately returned from the great waters. "Besides," he added significantly, "it is your bedtime."

The Senior Subaltern sulkily enough took the hint; and presently, breathing threats of dire vengeance in the near future, he moved across the parade—by a species of diagonal march not laid down in the drill book—towards his own quarters.

It is not my design—from considerations of time and space chiefly—to dwell unduly upon the pitfalls dug by his brethren about the Deadly Nightshade's path to knowledge. A fair and true summary of those military pits for the first six months alone would result in a tome more apoplectic—if less improving—than the Admiralty Instructions up to date. For anon—from the settlement of urgent private affairs, from the great seats of naval and military learning, from the brine-soaked claws of the Vampire itself—came subaltern, captain, and curly-laced major: and each in his turn was a later edition of *Many Inventions*. I would fain linger upon that summer's afternoon when, clad in full ball dress, the Deadly Nightshade was dispatched in a hansom to call upon the General Commanding the District. Gladly would I paint for you the bewilderment of the retired commissary-general's wife (whose address—ten miles

deep in the country—had been privily whispered in the cabby's ear) when, descending to her drawing-room, she beheld this gorgeous apparition set upon the hearthrug. Greatly also do I yearn to describe the haughty wonderment of certain other matrons in Society: who, returning home after some big social function, learned from a pasteboard lying upon their respective hall tables, not only that Mr. John Green had called in their absence, but that his regimental number was a billion, two millions, many thousands, more hundreds and ninety-nine. There are also to be related the little matters of the official visit to the Drum-Major's wife, and a presentation to the Colonel's (during the christening festivities of her youngest) of a table-spoon purloined for the occasion from the mess plate. Nevertheless, having set out to chronicle events of graver import, needs must that I defer the consideration of these pleasantries to a day when my heart shall lie less heavy within me.

•There was, however, dug for the Deadly Nightshade one pitfall into which not he, but another, fell; and the narrative thereof—out of respect to his evergreen memory—the historian may not lightly pass over with the rest.

It so chanced that the Senior Subaltern took counsel privily with others of his kidney, seeking a means of discomfiture to the Deadly Nightshade which should place the hat upon all previous efforts in that praiseworthy cause. Creeping stealthily by night to the door of the latter's quarters—which lay immediately above those of the Senior Subaltern

himself—the conspirators cunningly inserted beneath it the end of a two-fathom length of india-rubber tubing. The other extremity being affixed to a tap in the adjoining bathroom, and the tap turned on, the grand simplicity of this truly great conception becomes at once apparent to the most obtuse of practical jesters. When one considers, moreover, that the time chosen by the master mind was the dreadful hour of the violin practice (to the end that the sound of the running water might be lost in the screams of the tortured gut), one falls to marvelling at the thing's failure. For fail it assuredly did, from the Senior Subaltern's point of view. From that of the Deadly Nightshade, on the other hand, it seemed eminently successful—as you also shall speedily admit.

For the space of ten minutes—or it may be fifteen—the conspirators had sat at the stair-head, looking momentarily for the discomfiture they had planned. Yet it came not, strangely enough, with the swiftness they had a right to expect—in short, it came not at all. In the beginning the Senior Subaltern had been ecstatic. “He is sitting,” he had affirmed, with a confidence unwarranted by the context, “his back to the door, and his feet upon the fender, sawing at his infernal fiddle in blissful ignorance of the rising tide. Presently it will be the top of high water; and, oh! my friends, what wicked words we shall then hear.” But *A Life on the Ocean Wave* continuing to wail uninterruptedly through the keyhole, the Senior Subaltern became by and by less sanguine. “Let us,” said he uneasily, “reconnoitre;” and, pushing

open the door, they did so. In the midst of a perfectly dry floor stood the Deadly Nightshade, smilingly screwing up his fiddle pegs. Then the Senior Subaltern cannoned out of the room and down the stairs to his own quarters; and the others heard—as he had promised them—wicked words. For many square feet of damp ceiling lay upon his dripping bed; while, from an inch of india-rubber tubing thrust through a knot-hole in the exposed floor above, there fell—nay, had been falling for the past quarter of an hour—a steady stream of most beautiful and saturating water.

And so it came to pass that the Deadly Nightshade grew in worldly wisdom as in military knowledge, and, growing, found favour in the eyes of officer and man. For who so cheerfully undertook the duty of those called to the giddy Metropolis on urgent private affairs—or that of the absent merry-maker, when the afternoon milk-cart clattered to the cookhouse? Who—in spite of his inexperience—so rapidly learned to fathom the back of the private's mind, and to sympathise with the aspirations and crotchets of that important military unit? Nor was he by any means that *bête noir* of all ranks in Her Majesty's service—a fool at his job. For the suggested bagman of six months back became presently a marksman at musketry, and a smart drill on parade; while, on the seasick road of naval gunnery, he attained the *Ultima Thule* of V.G.I. "The boy," said the Major, airily expressing with his forefinger the general sentiment

of the mess, "may not handsome much; but, damme, he is none the less a gentleman for that. You fellows no doubt think yourselves devilish smart to have successfully pulled the leg of a youngster who doesn't yet know the Service"—the Major knew the Service, never fear—"but I can tell you this. I would rather have his brains than the intellect which most of you haven't!" Which saying is being pondered in the hearts of many even unto this day.

One thing, however, the Deadly Nightshade lacked—in common, it is true, with many of his brethren, but in a far greater degree than any of them—and that was the one thing needful. The poverty of the lad was appalling, and such as to make one doubt the wisdom of his choice of a profession.

Now, it befell upon a certain evening that the orderly officer lay in the Deadly Nightshade's quarters, enduring—for friendship's sake—the pandemonium of the latter's violin. The instrument—an exceeding cheap and nasty one—had been the parting gift of his father; and for the old man's sake his fingers and chin caressed it lovingly as he struggled nightly to conjure from it something resembling a melody. But the Deadly Nightshade, alas! like Trilby, was stone deaf; yet, unlike Trilby, had no Svengali at hand to hypnotise him into a divine musician. At length even friendship revolted.

"Why the devil, Deadly," hinted his audience, "don't you mute the strings?"

"I am sorry," apologised the player humbly, "but, you see, I haven't got one."

"A coin will do equally well."

The Deadly Nightshade seemed troubled. "The month is far spent," he stammered, "and—and, as a matter of fact, neither have I a coin!"

The other produced half-a-crown from his pocket. "Then for God's sake," he said, "stick that between the strings;" and the discords, thus hushed to a *pianissimo*, presently continued.

Suddenly there came a click and a jingling sound, and the Deadly Nightshade rattled his fiddle as a child doth a money-box.

"What's up now?" asked the orderly officer.

"I really am awfully sorry," said Deadly in confusion, "but—well, your half-crown has slipped into one of the holes in the violin, and I can't shake it out. If you don't mind waiting till the end of the month——"

"Rot!" interrupted the other. "Don't you bother about that, old man. It's a sacrifice, we'll say, in the sacred cause of Art!" Nevertheless as he presently went upon his way he marvelled greatly that such dreadful stonybrokenness should be joined to the frugal habits of the Deadly Nightshade.

"You would not though," retorted the Major, to whom he afterwards expressed his wonderment, "if you knew as much of his history as I do. Between ourselves," he went on, "my people belong to the same part of the world as his governor—a charming old chap, by the way—who retired from the Navy many years ago. It's the threadbare story of a commuted pension, a bogus company, bankruptcy,

and a hand-to-mouth existence ever afterwards. He must have pretty well starved himself to educate the boy and put him in the regiment—a thing it had always been his great ambition to do. The lad's mother died, I believe, in giving him birth, and there were no other children. What wonder then," concluded the Major, sawing the air with his forefinger, as though dictating another letter, "that he should have conceived an intense affection for this broken-down old man—his only relative in the world, who for years has denied himself many of the necessities of life in order that his boy might also bear the Queen's commission?"

One day the Deadly Nightshade missed from its accustomed place his cherished violin. The loss of this worthless toy of wood and gut he took greatly to heart; and for weeks went up and down like a cat after her lost kitten—searching for it in every spot but the right one, and buttonholing men on the matter till they ever afterwards retched at sight of a fiddle. At length, thrust up the chimney of his own quarters, he found it, and wept over its condition. For into its highly varnished body had been cunningly injected a pint of water, together with a peck of dried peas; which latter, presently swelling, had split asunder the unseasoned wood. "An enemy," said the Deadly Nightshade, tenderly laying the splintered wreck in its battered case, "hath done this thing," and ever afterwards held his peace. Now, consider that the Senior Subaltern it was who dwelt immediately beneath the discord-maker; and that—nay, not

lightly would one tax an officer and gentleman with so wanton and cruel a crime.

Time rolled on—would to God it sometimes rolled the other way!—till presently the greedy Vampire sucked through the barrack gate—amongst others—the Deadly Nightshade himself. And the screaming fifes played to the sea that day many a proper man, who has long since been but a name in a dusty record and a memory buried deep in some dear woman's heart.

It was at Malta—that fever-cursed dust-heap of Britannia's—that a strange and wondrous thing befell the Deadly Nightshade. This, indeed, was no less than his falling in love with the most beautiful and gracious of all the sweet English girls who bring charm and freshness each successive season to the sterile and sunbaked island. Yet a far more wonderful thing was it, perhaps, that any woman—least of all the perfect one of whom I speak—should be brought to look without dismay upon the ill-favoured person of the Deadly Nightshade. Nevertheless, strange as it may seem, she loved him; and he—who had never known the tenderness of mother or sister, or that still greater love—went for many days as one who walked on air. Why she should have stooped to smile on *him*, when the entire gilded youth of the garrison and fleet knelt continually before her, I know not; and indeed it were vain to probe a woman's heart in matters such as these. Perhaps she was one of those who—happily for the less comely of us, my brothers—are wont to look deeper than



the tinselled surface; and it may be that her true woman's instinct detected beneath the ill-fitting dogrobbier suit the sterling qualities of the gallant English gentleman.

One blissful, never-to-be-forgotten afternoon he had ridden with his love to solemn Città Vecchia—desiring from the bottom of his foolish heart that he might journey so for ever by her dear side towards those purple domes set in the golden sunset. Dallying long upon the homeward road, he had been constrained at length to run afoot to catch the wardroom dyso; and, midway off to the ship, had shivered—once. Yet no more than once is it needful for the Mediterranean Pirate to stretch forth his clammy finger! As the quicksilver leaps before the tropical blast, so the victim's temperature raced that night under the hot breath of the fever fiend. In the morning, wrapped about with blankets, they carried him to Bighi Hospital; and three days later he was babbling inconsequently of his splintered fiddle—of his love—of things in the heavens above and in the waters under the earth.

When it became presently noised abroad in the ship that the Pirate was forcing his captive along the slippery plank of *typhoid*, the wardroom with one accord cursed the climate, and the lower-deck the doctors. One of the detachment—a truculent private who had recently been in retirement for smuggling liquor—instantly conceived the bold project of conveying to the patient by stealth a bottle of ardent spirits; and high words with the hospital police

resulted from his attempt to carry it into execution. At length, however, came the red-letter day when—the crisis passed—the first feeble step was taken towards convalescence; and that night, in various stages of intoxication, the detachment lay for the most part in the several guardrooms of Valetta.

Stretched on his bed in the drowsy contentment born of great exhaustion, the Deadly Nightshade looked once more upon the golden prospect of the future. "You have turned the corner at last, my boy," had said to him that morning the Deputy Inspector-General of Hospitals and Fleets, "but—you must sit very tight for a bit. To attempt to get out of bed in your present condition, remember, would be simply fatal!"

Lying athwart his pillow were the fragrant violets which *she* had brought him in the afternoon; and he straightway fell to wondering in a dreamy way why the gods should send to so unworthy a recipient that rarest of all their gifts to mortal men—the love of a pure and beautiful woman. Presently the clocks of Senglea clanged the midnight hour, and, the door being suddenly thrust open, there stood upon the threshold—the Senior Subaltern!

"My room," cried the apparition, tossing his arms wildly about his head, "is chock-full of blue frogs, extended for the attack. For God's sake! Deadly, come and help me drive them out."

Then did the other dimly perceive that his ancient enemy was in the grip of delirium; and he vaguely remembered hearing that another fever patient had

been brought into the adjoining room that very afternoon. Swiftly was it borne in upon him that, unless this poor madman were speedily helped back to his bed, he would assuredly do himself some grievous bodily hurt. And then—like a red-hot flash—the recollection of the doctor's emphatic warning seared his enfeebled brain. For one brief moment he hesitated, while his soul went out in an agonised yearning towards his beloved: and he cursed the horrible cruelty of the thing. None the less did his duty to his stricken comrade lie plain before him: and the Deadly Nightshade had never yet shirked his job.

Struggling weakly from the bed, he tottered across the room and clutched the other's arm. "Come along, old man," he whispered, with a ghostly smile: "let us see if we can't flatten out those tactical frogs of yours between us."

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When they found him, he was lying across the legs of the Senior Subaltern—who, from between the bedclothes, was fretfully protesting his inability to sleep under a something iceberg.

## THEIR LORDSHIPS' BINOCULARS



## THEIR LORDSHIPS' BINOCULARS

UP and down the sacred starboard side of the cruiser's quarter-deck, in the soaking rain and the gathering gloom, paced the post-captain. On his sleeve, indicative of his exalted rank, were four gold rings and a curl; on his brow, suggestive of the rank's responsibilities, four deep wrinkles and a pucker. And never had the latter shown more plainly than to-night that the post-captain had something on his mind.

Between the ship and the distant loom of coast-line rolled a dismal waste of grey water, where a thousand sea-horses were shaking their white manes in ecstasy at the freedom of the open. For the cruiser was at anchor in the great estuary of the Plate, and the roadstead was exposed to the full force of the rapidly-rising gale. Early in the afternoon several officers had landed in the whaler; and it was the prolonged absence of this party which kept the post-captain out in the rain and deepened the lines on his forehead.

Presently he walked over to the gangway, where the first lieutenant was anxiously peering shorewards through his glass.

"Balhatchet," said he, "I'm getting uneasy about that boat. Can you see anything of her yet?"

The other slowly swept a large arc of the rain-blurred seascape with his telescope. Then shutting up the glass with a shrug that was more eloquent than words, he hailed the after bridge.

"Any signs of the whaler, signalman?"

"Not yet, sir," bawled down the figure in oilskins dimly silhouetted against the twilight.

"And her recall has been hoisted for more than an hour," mused the first lieutenant gravely.

"There's a devilish nasty sea running already for a small boat," observed the skipper, "and I don't like the hard look of the sky—it's going to blow. I'll send a cutter to look for her, Balhatchet."

"Aye, aye, sir. Bo'sun's mate, call away the first cutter!"

"And I'll send a lieutenant in her," added the skipper, as the shrill pipe sounded along the decks. "Who is there available?"

Balhatchet stroked his chin. "There's Mr. Tawney-Tull," he suggested, with hesitation.

"I won't have that damned fool go," said the skipper, with an energy that made his subordinate jump. "He's a thundering sight more likely to lose the cutter than find the whaler. You must tell off one of the others."

"We are one lieutenant short of complement,"

reckoned up the first luff; "Jones is on watch, Ayscough's ashore, and Farnham-Flagg is sick. There's no one else to send, sir."

"Well, I won't have a boat leave the ship in this weather at night without a lieutenant," snapped the skipper; "and if they send me an irresponsible mountebank in lieu of an executive officer, it's not my fault. But you can tell Mr. Tawney-Tull from me," he added, as he prepared to descend the after ladder, "that if he doesn't come back safely I'll try him by court-martial."

When Tawney-Tull appeared on deck in oilskins and sou'-wester he was duly and promptly informed of this somewhat equivocal menace—which lost nothing of its impressiveness in the mouth of Mr. Balhatchet. To the first lieutenant of a Queen's ship the naval crown is often a crown of thorns, and the sharpest thorn is the subordinate—happily rare—who is accounted a "fool at his job." Excuses may be found for the sanguine mariner who, mindful of the rule of the road at sea, expects a steam tram to give way to his hired tandem, and wakes to a consciousness of his error in a hospital ward. Something may be said for the unfortunate who, being bidden to an up-country station for a week's shooting, inaugurates his visit by knocking off a neighbouring tree his host's pet parrot and the finest talker in the colony. Even the unpractised squire of dames who miscalculates the power of his elbow, and swings a girl into the off-side flower-bed in place of the saddle, may (except by the maiden herself) be forgiven.



And each of these feats—with some greater—had Tawney-Tull achieved in the course of a single month.

But when an officer, being on watch, crashes one of Her Majesty's ships between the forestay- and stern-lights of an anchored barque, under the impression that they belong to different vessels; when he shoves off in the sailing pinnace with both sheets to wind'ard and the plug out; when at midnight he taps for ten precious minutes on the captain's door for permission to stop the engines in the interest of a man overboard; when he nearly plunges his country into war by hitting with an erratic torpedo the flagship of an irritable power—such a man, I say, does not inspire his superiors with enthusiasm. And these things also Tawney-Tull had done, adding to his account at Whitehall a great store of black marks in the doing.

"Away first cutter!" On the mess-deck the nightly din of banjoes, whistles, and concertinas, of half-a-thousand tongues in strenuous debate, ceased for an instant as the hoarse cry of the bo'sun's mate billowed down the hatchways. Then the babel continued, while the eleven men whom the pipe alone concerned tumbled up the ladders one by one, wrestling with their oilskins as they went. Into the cutter, hoisted high at her davits, they scrambled with the silence and agility of cats. "All clear, sir!" sang out the coxswain, assured that the plug was in and the life-lines were free, and "Lower away handsomely!" barked the officer of the watch to the

quarter-deckmen on the falls. Then followed the whimper of tackle under the friction of the block sheaves, the splash and clatter of a ten-oared boat met by a leaping sea, the clink of falls hastily unhooked. The bowmen fended her head off the ship's side with their boat-hooks as Tawney-Tull, hanging from the end of the sea gangway man-rope, dropped into the stern sheets. A rattle of oars falling into the rowlocks, the hiss of a drenching greenback, a command to "give way together," and the "irresponsible mountebank" and his eleven tarpaulins cheerfully vanished in Stygian darkness and the teeth of a rising gale in quest of their derelict brothers.

Then followed what seamen fitly term "a dirty night." The behaviour of the weather was deplorable. While the wind screamed curses through the cruiser's rigging, the rain hissed and spat at the bad-tempered sea, till the latter presently wallowed, and leaped, and foamed in a perfect frenzy of rage. The lightning stabbed viciously, and in a hundred different places, whenever it got the chance, and the din of the thunder was maddening. In short, the ill-mannered elements did everything in their tremendous power—except play the game for a score or so of British seamen drifting about at their mercy in a couple of open boats.

Twenty times at least that night the post-captain came on deck, and each time the markings on his forehead grew deeper. For neither whaler nor cutter returned, and to send more boats away in such vil-

lainous weather would have been midsummer madness indeed. Yet everything was done that common-sense and seamanship dictated ; and though, by reason of a breakdown of the dynamo, the search-light early in the middle watch went out with an indignant hiss, blue lights were burned, rockets sent up, and guns fired at intervals till dawn.

With the first glimmer of day a signalman with a glass slung over his shoulder climbed to the main-topmast head. Not a sign of a boat was visible anywhere on those countless acres of sullen, tumbled water. The barometer, however, was rising, and by breakfast-time the weather had moderated sufficiently to enable the launch, pinnace, steamboat, second cutter, and jolly-boat to be called away and sent in search of the derelicts. Spreading to leeward, their wakes radiating from the ship like the sticks of a fan, the little flotilla of boats set forth ; and an hour later it was barely visible to the look-out clinging to the mast-head.

On board the cruiser the anxious hours of that forenoon watch dragged themselves along with leaden feet. The first lieutenant being on deck, the special painting party in the flats below had their heads out of the scuttles till dinner-time. The five-foot-eight privates of the Royal Marine Light Infantry—whose waking hours are occupied mainly in sand-papering spanners, stanchions, and hose-nozzles into a state of dazzling polish—neglected this sacred duty to stand on ladders and crane their necks over hatchway coamings. The gravity of which dereliction assumes

its true value when one considers that even on the morn of a general action, before casting loose the guns, the rites of the great naval gods, Paint and Polish, would assuredly first be celebrated.

At length the general anxiety was in part allayed, for shortly after seven bells a mighty shout went up that the search boats were returning, and that the missing whaler was among them. Half-an-hour later ten dripping, unkempt officers and men clambered on to the quarter-deck, and explained how in a waterlogged boat they had drifted at the eleventh hour under the lee of an islet; and how they had baled out and hauled the boat up on the beach, spending the remainder of the villainous night—if not in comfort, at least in safety—huddled between her and a driftwood fire. Of Tawney-Tull and the cutter neither rag nor stick had they clapped eyes on.

Then the lines on the post-captain's forehead gathered themselves into a knot, and he swore softly under his breath. For, the whaler having managed to weather the gale, he set down the loss of the stouter and bigger boat to Tawney-Tull's lack of seamanship.

"Yet in weather like last night's, sir," hazarded the first lieutenant, on the "*De mortuis*" principle, "the smartest seaman in the Service might easily have been swamped."

"He *might*," rejoined the skipper testily. "The point is that, in the case of the dam—I mean, the poor fellow who is drowned, the swamping was a foregone conclusion."

\* \* \* \* \*

Many miles below the roadstead the coast of Uruguay takes a big trend to the eastward; and round this corner, with housed topgallant-masts and a tattered red ensign flying from her peak, there lay at anchor the most disreputable-looking of merchant brigs. Her only two boats were lashed bottom upwards athwart the deck, but, incongruously enough, riding by a long painter astern, bobbed a trim, white-painted man-of-war's cutter. The dawn was breaking—an hour when all good mariners, save the watch, should be snoring in their bunks. Nevertheless from the depths of the frowsy fo'c'sle came the roar of a music-hall chorus, and the number of choristers seemed out of all proportion to the needs of so small a vessel.

Under the smoky swing lamp in the cramped, tobacco-reeking cabin two men were sitting in their shirt-sleeves. On the table between them stood a basin of steaming coffee, from which they drank in turn, and their general demeanour suggested a meeting of long-parted bosom friends.

Yet they had foregathered that night for the first time in their lives, and it certainly seemed unlikely that they would ever cross each other's path again. For one—the bald-headed, husky-voiced, red-faced one with the squint and the fringe of carroty whisker—was Hardy Fell, master mariner in the British mercantile marine, while his companion was no other than Lieutenant Tawney-Tull of Her Britannic Majesty's Navy.

"I'm that lamblike by natur'," the husky voice was explaining, "that a child might play with me—even when this yacht o' Beelzebub's misses stays. But wotever you do"—here the lamb banged the table with a vigour that made the coffee leap in the basin—"don't talk to me o' rewards. I'm a honest British seaman, that's wot I am, an' the knowledge of 'avin' done 'is dooty is reward enough for Cap'en 'Ardy Fell."

The honest seaman cocked a chest, and squinted virtuously at the smoky beams overhead.

"In these days of self-advertisement," observed the guest hurriedly, "the sentiment does you gweat cweedit. When I said that I thought your gallantwy of last night ought to weceive some sort of official wecognition, I never for one moment dweamt that I should wound your susceptibilities."

The master mariner shifted his squint from the beams to the basin. "'Ave some more corfy," he suggested, pushing the latter across the table.

"Thanks. But all the same," continued Tawney-Tull grandiloquently, as he gulped down a mouthful of concentrated chicory and cockroach, "I shall consider it *my* duty to forward a weport of our wescue thwough the pwoper official channels."

"From all I've 'eard tell," mused the merchant skipper gloomily, "the tide in them channels is dam' sluggish."

"That is as it may be," rejoined the lieutenant stiffly, with the Service fool's veneration for red tape; "but you're all the more certain of wecognition in the long wun."

"My gawdfather!"—again the basin danced upon the table—"but you're enough to give a man a sick 'eadache! I tell you I don't want no recognition for savin' life at sea, an', what's more, I won't 'ave no blanky recognition!"

Mr. Tawney-Tull made haste to change the subject. "How long do you expect to be away on this twip of yours up the wiver?" he asked.

"In a one 'orse-power git-up of a pauper's 'earse like this 'ere," opined the master of the brig, "anythink between eternity and three months."

"Well, at all events, if we are here when you weturn, you must come on board the cwuiser and look us up. I am sure the skipper would like to thank you for——"

"Jumpin' Je'oshaphat! 'Ow many more times am I to tell you——Oh! look 'ere. Wot you'd better do is to turn into my bunk an' try an' get this little picnic off your chest with some 'olesome sleep. I'm only waitin' for the young flood—the tide turns in less than an hour—to weigh, an' get the old junk on the road again; an' when we're abreast o' your ship I'll put you aboard of 'er in your own boat."

Tawney-Tull pulled his boots off with alacrity. "Thanks, awfully," he said; "as a matter of fact, I can hardly keep my eyes open."

"Well, you won't want to use them till sunset at the earliest," grumbled the skipper, as he ascended the ladder. "It's a dead beat to wind'ard, and the pig-'eaded old sea-cow is safe to miss stays every bloomin' time we put the 'elm down."

\* \* \* \* \*

So absorbed was every one on board the cruiser in watching the return of the boats, that it was long before anybody had leisure to note a brig, hull down, that was reaching out from the land.

Indeed it was well on in the afternoon before one of the signalmen on watch drew his mate's attention to her.

"Looks like one o' they white-apron females staggerin' down Portsea 'Ard of a pay night, don't she?" observed the latter, with his glass fixed on her patched square foresail.

"If you arst me," returned the other, "I should say she'd lost all her sailormen overboard last night in the gale, an' was being sailed by the cook's mate. Watch 'er! That's the third time to my certain knowledge that she's missed stays in the last 'alf-hour."

Then the brig wore, and as her stern came into full view, the first signalman shut up his glass with a snap, and ran down the ladders to the captain's cabin.

"There's an English brig beatin' to wind'ard a couple o' miles astern of us, sir, an'—she's got our cutter in tow!"

One grieves to think how sadly the efficiency of the fighting ship must have been impaired by that day of happy surprises. For again all the afternoon the heads of the special painting party were thrust through the lower-deck scuttles, while, as in the morning, the tall Marines craned their necks over the hatchway coamings. When three hours later the brig, now abeam,



hauled up her mains'l, squared her main-yard, and lay to, the excitement was intense.

But when the cutter was dropped alongside, and twelve draggle-tailed mariners clambered into her, all discipline was at an end for a full five minutes. Paint-brushes, brooms, and brassrags were dropped as though they were red-hot, and the cruiser listed appreciably to port with the rush of the entire ship's company to man that side.

Then Tawney-Tull, once more on the sacred quarter-deck, told a brief tale of gallant rescue and open-handed hospitality. And as the brig, with her tattered red ensign streaming from the peak, staggered clumsily away close-hauled on the starboard tack, three ringing cheers went up from the cruiser for the honest British seaman who got sick headaches at the bare mention of the word "reward!"

\* \* \* \* \*

So glowing a picture did Tawney-Tull paint of his friend Hardy Fell's behaviour, that the post-captain (the lines now smoothed from his forehead) sent a report of the case to the senior naval officer, who in turn forwarded it to the Admiralty. The natural result of this action was the arrival at Montevideo three months later of the orthodox pair of binoculars, with the direction that they should be "presented to Hardy Fell, master mariner, as a mark of their Lordships' appreciation of his seamanlike conduct." As the arrival coincided most opportunely with that of the cruiser, and of Hardy Fell himself in his disreput-

able brig, it was arranged that a public function should be organised, at which the British consul should present their Lordships' testimonial to this most gallant yet modest of British seamen.

Now, in view of the latter's known aversion to any reward (other than the approval of his own conscience), it was deemed advisable to keep him in ignorance of the proposed ceremony up to the last possible moment. Indeed, the English ladies of Montevideo were putting the finishing touches to the flower-decked, flag-draped dais ere the consular constable was dispatched on board the brig with a polite request for the honour of Captain Hardy Fell's immediate presence at the consulate.

Then followed an awkward stage wait of two hours by the consular clock, and, seeing that the brig was berthed alongside the adjacent dock wall within an easy ten minutes of the consulate, it was plain to everybody that the constable was encountering considerable difficulty in overcoming the honest seaman's bashfulness. On the red baize-covered platform, in their best store clothes, sat the consul, the bishop, the senior naval officer, the post-captain, and Tawney-Tull, comparing watches, and—except the prelate—saying things *sotto voce*. In the row of chairs facing them sat half-a-dozen ladies, yawning behind their fans, and mentally pulling each other's toilettes and characters to tatters. On the table between, flanked by an Admiralty letter and a carafe of water, lay their Lordships' binoculars.

Still the coyness of the honest seaman prevailed over the consular constable's blandishments.

"Such an ideal English sailor, you know," explained the senior naval officer's wife to the bishop's estimable helpmate—who could not be expected to know much of seafaring matters—"so modest, and yet so prompt in emergency. My dear, if he hadn't stopped the brig's engines in the nick of time, and thrown grappling-irons into the boat as she drifted by, poor Mr. Tawney-Tull wouldn't be where he is now."

Had the latter manœuvre really been carried out, Mr. Tawney-Tull would assuredly now have been in his coffin; and, indeed, he looked as if he would much prefer being there to occupying his present position. For at that moment a husky voice without was heard protesting (with many strange sea oaths) that it would "'ave the law on the counsel for causin' a honest British seaman to be man-handled by a prize-fighter rigged up in a copper's uniform."

"While as for that there Tawney-Tull," added the voice—and I shudder to think of the adjective prefixed to that aristocratic name in the hearing of the ladies—"me an' him 'll 'ave a bone to pick nex' time 'e crosses my bows."

So far from evincing any desire to cross the honest seaman's bows, Tawney-Tull promptly shifted his position, so as to bring the portly form of the right reverend prelate between himself and the door. The next moment there burst upon the assembly a circular disturbance of great severity, the elements of

which appeared to be a ginger-whiskered squint and a police tunic locked in close embrace. Not until it reached the platform did this typhoon subside, when the elements resolved themselves into the consular constable and the laggard Man of the Hour himself.

The latter collapsed heavily upon the chair which bore his Lordship's shovel hat, while the former dabbed a bloody nose, and said hard things in a stage whisper to Lieutenant Tawney-Tull.

"The next time you want 'omicidal maniacs asked to our 'At 'omes,'" he remarked with a snuffle, "I 'ope you'll send the invitation by post! I found 'im"—he indicated the limp figure in the chair by a jerk of his head—"in a public-'ouse down by the docks; and 'e got it into 'is silly 'ead 'e was wanted for the purpose of 'aving 'is certif'cate suspended. Of course there was a bit of a onset. An' what's more," continued the battered constable vindictively, "'e 'asn't been nigh 'is bloomin' ship for a week!"

"You're a liar," rejoined his enemy with maritime directness, "and I'll 'ave the law on you as well, you swab, I will, for libellin' a honest British seaman."

Anticipating the constable's reply, the senior naval officer hurriedly opened the proceedings with a few well-chosen phrases. "The gallant officer"—I quote from the refreshingly original report of the one English paper—"concluded his remarks by inviting Mr. Tawney-Tull to recapitulate the circumstances under which the man-of-war's boat was so

gallantly rescued." Which Mr. Tawney-Tull, with much enthusiasm and a lisp increased by nervousness, proceeded to do.

Murderous resentment, sullen suspicion, helpless bewilderment had each in turn been expressed upon the red, weather-bitten face of the guest of the afternoon, and now, at Tawney-Tull's oratory, it finally wreathed itself into the fatuous smile of the slumbering dipsomaniac.

"Completely worn out, my dear, by watch-keeping," explained the senior naval lady to the bishopess; "the way some ship-owners overwork their crews is simply scandalous."

The thrilling—if somewhat incoherent—narrative of Lieutenant Tawney-Tull having been rapturously received by the ladies, the consul rose to make the presentation. "Rarely had a pleasanter task fallen to his lot," he declared, "than the one he was called upon that afternoon to perform. Gallantry in a British seaman," he was proud to say, "was ~~no~~ more than they all expected; but when gallantry was coupled with such modesty as that set forth in the graphic tale they had just listened to, the task was doubly gratifying. It was therefore with the greatest pleasure that he handed to Captain Hardy Fell the very handsome token of their Lordships' appreciation."

The honest seaman being rudely shaken into wakefulness by the constable, the fatuous smile speedily gave place to a squint of intense ferocity. In the

consul's outstretched hands, with leather case and sling complete, lay their Lordships' binoculars. Presently the squint focussed them, and its owner shied like a cab-horse.

"Wot the 'ell's that bunch o' cat's meat?" he demanded huskily.

The consul, with chilling hauteur, explained.

"For me! From the Lords Commish'ners o' the Bri'sh Admiralty! *That* tup-penny 'a'-penny woman's fal-lal for the theaytre as a reward for savin' a boatful o' Navy tailors bumpin' about at night on the 'igh seas! Where's a honest seaman's compensation for all the paint an' gildin' scraped off his ship's side? Look 'ere, mister"—he leaped to his feet, and banged the table with his fist—"wot I wants, an' wot I mean to 'ave, is five 'undred dollars! Don't make no mistake about it Five——'undred——dollars, an' not a red cent less!"

While the ladies hurriedly made for the door, Tawney-Tull endeavoured to appease his ruffled *protégé*. He was promptly met with a rebuff in the shape of a black eye that lasted him for weeks afterwards.

Then the honest seaman gave full vent to his outraged feelings. He flung the bishop's shovel hat at the consul, and emptied the carafe over the senior naval officer and the post-captain. After which he operated on his enemy the constable with mould from the flower-pots till that unhappy myrmidon resembled a moribund earthworm.

Finally, with a great crash of glass, he hurled their Lordships' binoculars through the window.

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"Excessive watch-keeping at sea produces some very remarkable results," observed the bishopess demurely, at afternoon tea.

"One lump, or two, dear?" inquired the senior naval lady sweetly.

JOOPITER PLOOVIUS, PRIVATE





## JOOPITER PLOOVIUS, PRIVATE

THERE was no blinking the fact that it had set in for a thoroughly wet day. The blurred loom of Yes Tor above the church roof proclaimed it, and the attitude of a row of sparrows, silently preening their feathers beneath the opposite eaves, was eloquent of a resignation to the inevitable. Not even that pugilistic champion of the west-country weather, Mr. Pagett, late private in the Royal Marines and present landlord of the "Coach and Horses," could decently deny it. Wherefore, after we had moodily flattened our noses for the best part of an hour against the upper half of the red-curtained window in the bar, I was emboldened to say those disrespectful things of his native climate that had long lain on my tongue-tip.

He took them even better than I had anticipated. "Aye," he slowly conceded, as he drummed with his knuckles on the misty pane, "there's no gainsayin' but what the Joopiter Ploovius o' Jackaland<sup>1</sup> takes a pride in his job ; but——"

<sup>1</sup> Devon and Cornwall.

I looked up. Mr. Pagett in the flesh was gazing dreamily at the now almost-blotted-out tor, but it was evident that in spirit that truly great man was much further afield. Therefore, possessing my soul in patience, I preserved a seemly silence, until he presently returned with the reminiscence I was fully expecting.

"... But," he concluded, as though ten minutes had not elapsed since the beginning of the sentence, "this 'ere is footlin' child's-play to what a amatoor as I knew of once done in the same line—though I says it as shouldn't."

The identity of the amateur being unmistakably indicated by this modest admission, I expressed my interest at learning that Mr. Pagett had dabbled in the science of rain-making.

"You may lay to it 'owever," explained the ex-private sententiously, "that, if the end 'adn't justified the means, nothin' would 'ave indooiced me to play old 'Arry with the weather arrangements o' Providence. It was a case o' grave emergency."

"From a churchwarden," said I—for no less an office, indeed, did Mr. Pagett hold—"so orthodox a sentiment is becoming. Would it be an indiscretion to inquire what the emergency was?"

My host's eye wandered to the little window between the snug bar and the cheery, fire-lit kitchen beyond, where a comely, buxom woman was directing the labours of an apple-cheeked maid-of-all-work.

"I wanted to get mar—— 'As you were!'" He corrected himself with a jerk. "I mean, by turnin'

on the rain in the nick o' time I saved one of Her Majesty's ships o' war from total destruction."

Three minutes later a jug of hot water, a basin of lump sugar, a lemon, a couple of tumblers, and a bottle of golden Glenlivet stood between us on the little table in the snug bar. I cut the lemon, and melodramatically flourished the knife in Mr. Pagett's face.

"That story, or your life!" said I.

"The story, then," he grinned, "seein' as I've no desire to make the missus a widow before her time. It was this way, look. Me, an' a cawpril, an' four other privates, with a proportion o' seamen, stokers, idlers, and oficers—not forgettin' Lootenant-Com-mander Pringle—'ad just commissioned one o' they flat-iron, 'arbour-defence gunboats for the Australian station. She was a third-class, twin-screw, three 'undred an' sixty ton, two 'undred 'orse-power buggy, with a eight-inch gun for'ard and a six-inch aft, and she steered like a runaway motor-cab. 'Er tally was the *Blue Gum*."

"In spite of your pre-Raphaelite picture of her," I interrupted unguardedly, "I cannot recall her name."

"Pre'aps not—but you'll mind the *Cloudesley Shovel*?" inquired Mr. Pagett fiercely.

I hastened to assure him—God forgive me!—that I did.

"Very well, then," he returned, graciously filling his pipe from my pouch, "when we sailed from Spit'ead, that there lop-eared bug-trap was the *Cloudesley*

*Shovel*: and the colonial noospapers told their readers that at last they were goin' to get some value for their money, since the Imperial Gover'ment was sendin' them out the nooest addition to the *Admiral* class o' battleship. Consequently, the day we was expected at Sydney the Circular Quay steamers reaped a golden 'arvest by carryin' some ten thousand o' these readers out to Manley Beach. But when the picnickers saw the little *Shovel* creepin' sideways through the 'Eads, they were so indignant that the admiral, on his own responsibility, and by way of soothin' their wounded feelin's, ordered her to be rechristened the *Blue Gum*."

"Say 'when,'" said I, helping Mr. Pagett to the whisky.

"'When,'" he responded, as soon as the golden fluid reached the top of the pretty, "but for 'eaven's sake, don't go an' drown the miller! Steady on with that there 'ot water, sir!"

I steadied. Mr. Pagett helped himself to lemon and sugar, and continued.

"So much for the prelimin'ry detail; now for the 'istorical fac's themselves. A few weeks later we were layin' low up the Brisbane River, for the purpose o' givin' the junk a 'stand easy' an' a bit of a over'aul after her thirteen-thousand-mile trip across the globe. The engines was all to pieces, and some o' the parts ashore: and, since we 'ad landed all the stores, ammunition, and coal, in order to careen the ship an' get some o' the weed an' barnacles off 'er bottom, she was only drawin' about four foot o' water.

"Now, we were berthed alongside a small spit o' mud that jutted out into the river, bein' made fast to a couple o' bollards driven into its banks just above 'igh-water mark. One mornin' at daybreak I went up on to the fo'c'sle to relieve the sentry o' the middle watch.

" 'All correc'?' says I.

" 'All correc', says he—'excep' that the old hooker seems to 'ave got a devil of a strain on them 'awzers. She's pullin' the blank bollards under water!'

"Sure enough, barely 'alf a foot o' them was visible, but before I'd been on sentry-go an hour there wasn't even that much left to swear by. Then all of a sudden I tumbled to the situation.

" 'Quartermaster,' I sang out, 'this blessed old Noah's Ark will be adrift in another ten minutes. The bloomin' river's risin'!'

"With that he jumps down below, an' rouses out the skipper, who by an' by comes saunterin' up on deck in his panjammers an' a chol'ra belt. There was never no panic about Lootenant-Commander Pringle, bless you! who was that resourceful he once rigged an' sailed a engineless train in war time—but there, I've spun you that yarn before. Any'ow, twenty minutes after Pringle come on deck we 'ad a couple o' anchors laid out to the 'ighest part o' the spit, an' piped to breakfast in accordance with routine.

"Faster an' faster rose the muddy water all that mornin', till the rapidly increasin' current, eddyin'

round the spit, tautened out our noo 'awsers like a couple o' banjo-strings. Then things began to come down the main stream—trees, an' dead animals, an' wooden 'ouses full o' furniture, an' such-like—slowly at first an' singly, but later on jammed in great solid, spinnin' masses that would 'ave played old 'Arry with the gunboat if she 'adn't been under the lee o' the spit.

"By the time we piped to dinner that lop-eared river was 'alf as broad again as 'e was meant to be.

"'Cawpril,' says I, as the risin' wind began to 'um a toon on the taut 'awsers, 'I wish I'd obliged the ofricers in Plymouth barricks by takin' up that there billet o' mess-waiter. These onnat'ral phenomenons o' the Anti Podes are a bit 'arassin' to the nerves. What's the meanin' of it all, anyway?'

"'Tis nothin',' says the cawpril, who'd been out on the station before as a drummer, an' give himself airs in consequence: 'no one in these parts takes ~~any~~ 'eed of a little water, more or less, bein' in the river. At 'ome, I suppose, they'd call it a inondation.'

"'At 'ome!' says I, as the zinc roof of a Baptist' chapel banged against the side. 'I should call Noah's flood a fool to it. There was no danger, any'ow, o' the Ark bein' stove in by derelic' Nonconformis' places o' worship.'

"Then the cawpril points to a tree 'alf-way up the spit.

"'When the water wets the lowest bough o' that

there gum,' says he, with a cocksureness that put the 'eart into me again, 'you can turn into your 'ammick as free from forebodin's as a noo-born babby in its cradle. Noah's 'bow in the clouds' ain't a surer sign that there'll be no more flood—for another five years, at any rate.'

"But when, at supper-time, the yellow water 'ad not only wetted that bough, but completely 'idden the entire tree, even the cawpril's lower jaw dropped several 'oles: and by sunset the situation 'ad become desp'rate.

"Now, 'alf-a-mile above the spit the river was spanned by a railway bridge: an' nat'rally, as soon as the water 'ad risen to the crown o' the arches, nothin' more in the way o' Baptis' chapels—or anythin' else, for that matter—could pass through. In a few minutes the wreckage of a score of 'appy 'omes was grindin' an' churnin' against the iron girders, with a noise—as the wardroom messman said—like a giant's pantry-boy a-cleanin' of 'is knives in a knife machine; an' just before midnight there come a crack an' a roar that brought the watch below out o' their 'ammicks like one man.

"'What the 'Alifax was that?' asks a bluejacket, with both feet in one leg of his pants.

"'It sounded to me,' says a Marine, in his 'urry sittin' down in a spitkid, 'like a infantry volley followed by a nartillery salvo.'

"'Clear lower-deck!' shouts the bo'sun's mate down the 'atchway, an' up the ladder we tumbles into a



perfec' 'Ades of a night for blackness an' din. It was blowin' with 'urricane force, it was rainin' great smotherin', slantin'dicular sheets o' water, and the thunder an' lightnin' was worse than the 'ole o' the British Navy at target practice together. Lastly, there was the river itself, roarin' an' hissin' like a fleet o' *Campanias* blowin' off steam.

"'Stand by!' bellows Pringle through his speakin'-trumpet—megaphones they call 'em in the noo Navy —'the railway bridge 'as broke adrift, an' the blessed spit's goin' to follow soot!'

"The words—which sounded no louder than a whisper in the uproar o' the elements—were 'ardly out of his mouth, when a great black barrier o' water loomed over the ridge. Its crest was bristlin' with railway sleepers like broken bottles on a orchard wall, an' the solid tongue o' land crumbled away before it as though it 'ad been a child's castle on the sand. The nex' minute Her Majesty's gunboat *Blue Gum* was spinnin' down the Brisbane River teetotumwise, an' bangin' about in the pitch darkness and a seethin' whirlpool, in comp'ny with 'alf the wreckage o' Queensland.

"For the best part of an hour the old junk revolved like a steam giddy-go-round at a fair, till the distant lights o' Brisbane reminded me of a shower o' shootin' stars in November. We were no fresh-water sailors in the *Blue Gum*, and it took more'n a two-reef breeze to make us sea-sick; but that night every mother's son, from me an' Pringle downwards, vomited up his

soul. The wheel-ropes 'avin' carried away, the tiller 'ad taken charge, and was doin' its level best to knock a couple of 'oles in the ship's side; though she was leakin' like a sieve already for that matter, by reason of a collision with a runaway up-country town 'all. But we were far too sick o' life to get our 'eads up off the deck, an' the man with his boots on my stummick 'ad already begun to sing 'Twinkle, twinkle'—the only 'ymn he could remember—when the old roundabout stopped with a jerk, an' the shootin' stars became Brisbane lights once more.

"'She's took the ground!' shouts the singer, in the middle o' 'like a di'mond in the sky.'

"'I wish you'd take your pore feet off o' my chest, cawpril,' says I—for the cawpril it turned out to be. 'She may 'ave took the ground,' I says, after he'd stood up, 'but she certainly takes the cake for "turnin' circles." After this night's picnic I'd back her to turn quicker and in a smaller circumf'rence than any ship of her size on the Navy List.' An' with that I drops off to sleep.

"I was woke by a kick in the ribs. It was barely daylight, an' all the ship's comp'ny 'ad rolled down into the starboard scuppers, the ship 'avin' a list to that side of forty degrees at least. Pringle it was as give me the kick.

"'Rouse out, you tired sons of 'Am,' he was sayin', 'an' show a leg! The blessed ship 'll be on her beam ends in a brace o' shakes, if we don't bear a 'and an' shore her up!'

"Then we rubbed our eyes, an' stared, an' blinked, an' stared again; for we were completely surrounded by trees, an' shrubs, an' flowers—all drippin' with mud, and stickin' out o' the water on every side.

"But Pringle didn't give us much time for admirin' the scenery, be sure o' that. All the mornin' an' forenoon he kep' us workin' like niggers, shorin' the ship up with spare spars, an' railway sleepers, an' what not; and by the time we'd finished the job the flood 'ad so far subsided that we could walk underneath her bilge keels.

"Can you prick off her position on the chart, cawpril?' I asks, when we come inboard to dinner.

"No, I can't,' says he, 'because she ain't on no chart at all—she's on the Ordnance Survey. We're in the middle o' the Brisbane Botanical Gardins,' he says, 'and, seein' as the old dhow's more'n a mile from her native element, the best thing Pringle can do is to sell her to the Botanical Society for a restaurong, an' bolt with the money.'"

Between the orthodox china shepherd and shepherdess on the mantelpiece of the bar-parlour lay the tiny model of a ship inclosed in a bottle. Mr. Pagett pointed to it with his pipe-stem.

"The chawbacons o' these parts," said he, "wonder 'ow that there ship got into the bottle. In the same way the people o' Brisbane—an' ourselves, for that matter—used to wonder 'ow the devil the *Blue Gum* was goin' to get out o' them Botanical Gardins. Even Pringle himself, that most resourceful o' seamen,

allowed that he was fairly in the soup this time. More as a matter o' form than from any 'ope of ever floatin' her, we put the engines together again, getting the missin' parts—along with a few 'undred tons o' coal—from Brisbane. But we'd no 'eart to do a hand's turn more, and by the end of a fortnight passion-flowers were trailin' up the sides an' sweet potatoes round the masts and funnel. Drills an' routine gradually stopped, as well as our nightly sing-song on the fo'c'sle; an' so little like a man-o'-war was the *Blue Gum*, an' so much like a bloomin' monast'ry, that a couple o' laughin' jackasses actooally built their nest in the steam siren!"

Mr. Pagett's eye again wandered meditatively towards the comely figure in the kitchen. "And then," he slowly continued, "I got into mischief."

"For idle hands," said I, sententiously, "Satan ever finds mischief. Did you turn larrikin, and stick up the mail-coach?"

"No, sir," he returned moodily, "I did *not* rob the mail-coach; but I fell in love with the head-gard'ner's daughter!"

"Your style, Mr. Pagett," said I, "reminds me of Ollendorff."

"I've never been there," growled the ex-sea-soldier testily, "an' I don't want to. After we 'ad walked out the proper number of evenin's, I did her the honour to ask her to marry me. But—so cussedly contrairy are women-folk—she wouldn't 'ear of it, she said, till I was drawin' somethin' more than bare

private's pay, an' would never 'ave to come to sea no more."

"You should have obliged the officers in Plymouth barracks by taking up that mess-waiter billet," I reminded him.

"And in consequence," retorted Mr. Pagett warmly, "never 'ave met the best, an' the most cleverest—— But I must cut this long-winded yarn short. One evenin', before turnin' in, I was smokin' my pipe in the Gardins, when a beautiful inspiration come to me."

"After what you have just told me, Mr. Pagett," I interrupted, shaking a finger at him, "I will bet that her name wasn't Nicotine!"

"Well, then, I ain't goin' to take you up," he retorted, "because I don't know what you're drivin' at. Anyway, leanin' disconsolate over the gunboat's poop-rail in the moonlight was Pringle, worryin' out his defence for the court-martial, most like; an' I goes straight up to him with my inspiration.

"'I beg your pardon, Mr. Pringle, sir,' says I, 'but may I speak to you a minute?'

"'No,' says he, 'you mayn't—not if you was the Dep'ty Judge-Advocate hisself!'

"'There won't be no court-martial, sir—if you're thinkin' o' that,' says I.

"'You three-cornered son of a charwoman,' says he, standin' up, 'you're drunk!'

"'I'm sober enough, anyway,' I replies with dignity, 'to put you in the way of anchorin' this ship in

the Brisbane River within the nex' twenty-four hours.'

"'I'll put *you* under the sentry's charge,\* my fine feller,' he begins, when I interrupts him.

"'Alf a mo', sir; 'alf a mo'. If you'll do me a certain favour,' I says, 'as 'll cost you no more than a sheet o' paper, a onvelope, an' a tuppenny-'a'penny stamp, I'll give you my word of honour,' I says, 'as a private in Her Majesty's service,' I says, 'that I'll 'ave a foot o' water under the old junk's keel by sunset to-morrow!'

"'My pore feller,' says Pringle, after he'd taken stock o' me, 'I was wrong. You ain't drunk—you're stark, starin' mad. Yet many a brilliant idea,' he went on to himself, 'has been 'atched in a loonatic asylum. What d'you want me to do?'

"'To get me took on as orficers' mess-waiter at Plymouth,' I says, 'for a service rendered to the State.'

"'There's method in your madness, at any rate,' he admitted sarcastically, 'but I should like to know first, Mr. Pagett, 'ow you propose renderin' that there service.'

"'When I was on the west coast of Africa some years back,' I explained, 'I picked up with one o' them mad rain-doctors, who——'

"'Drain-doctor?' says Pringle. 'I suppose you mean a kind o' sanit'ry inspector.'

"'R-a-n-e, rain-doctor,' I repeated, 'who, for a prick o' 'baccy and a bottle o' rum, put me up to some o'

the tricks o' his trade. Now, in these very Gardins,' says I, 'I've spotted some o' the most indispensable 'erbs used in rain-making——'

"'Oh, very well then,' says Pringle, cutting me short with a yawn, 'make a fool of yourself if you like, an' be damned to you!' But I knew he was a drownin' man clutchin' at a straw, all the same.

"The rest o' that moonlight night I spent in the Gardins, gatherin' the necess'ry 'erbs, which I then took on board and shoved, along with some water, into the largest mess-kettle from the galley. Next, with three boardin'-pikes I made a trypot, which I set up at daybreak on the 'ard mud abreast the ship; an' from the trypot I 'ung the kettle, and underneath it I lit a fire, an' round it with a burnt stick I traced the thunder circle, into which the lightnin' pegs must be drove. Then, mutterin' the proper incantations, I begins to stir the potion, and to—— But I ain't goin' to give away *all* the secrets o' rain-makin', because onscrup'lous persons might use this great power for private purposes.

"Now the entire ship's comp'ny, o' course, 'ad turned out to see me bring the rain; and while they stood round, jeerin' an' scoffin'—there being no sign of a cloud in the sky—the cawpril arrived on the scene, breathless with excitement.

"'Ang me if I can make 'ead or tail of it!' he exclaims. 'Accordin' to the almanacs, an' the sailin' directions—not to mention my own pussonal experi-

ence—it shouldn't 'ave 'appened for another five years at least !'

" 'What shouldn't 'ave 'appened, cawpril?' asks Pringle, who was there in his panjammers' an' chol'ra belt.

" 'I've just been to look at my night-lines,' says the cawpril, addressin' the crowd in gen'ral, 'and strike me silly if that there ondisciplined river ain't in flood again the twentieth part of a bloomin' century before he's entitled !'

" 'Gentlemen,' says I, takin' off my 'at, 'my scientific labours—which I commenced yesterday evenin'—'ave been crowned with success. Any tomfool of a rain-maker can attrac' clouds to the spot where he himself 'appens to be : but I, Pagett, 'ave indooed a downfall at the springs o' the river, sixty miles away in the mount'ins, where it will nat'rally produce the greatest effec'. Cap'n Pringle, sir, you can raise steam as soon as you like : for, as I promised you, by sunset the junk will be afloat again.'

"The second flood—my flood—was even bigger than the first : an' by the time it 'ad subsided, H.M.S. *Blue Gum* was once more at anchor in Brisbane River."

\* \* \* \* \*

A dripping customer entered the bar, and Mr. Pagett, with many apologies, left me to attend to him. A moment later the comely hostess, glancing through the glass door, and seeing that I was alone, came and joined me in the parlour.



"You shouldn't let that husband of mine weary you with his yarns, sir," she said smilingly. "Only give him a good listener, and he's as happy as the day is long."

"Then he has two reasons, Mrs. Pagett," said I, with a bow, "for being the happiest of men, for I am certain he can have no lack of listeners. He has just been entertaining me with an account of the stranding and salvage of H.M.S. *Blue Gum*."

"The *Blue Gum*!" She laughed pleasantly. "God bless the man! I wonder what he will call her the next time he tells the story! Anyway, I shall always be thankful that I was instrumental in saving the life of that poor little mite of a black baby."

"Naturally," I returned; "though I confess I don't quite see where the black baby comes into the story."

"Why, it was the mother, poor thing! who, out of gratitude, brought me warning of that very unexpected second flood. You've heard, sir, of the marvellous rapidity with which news travels among the aborigines? I must have known of those thunderstorms in the mountains—more than sixty miles away—a good ten hours before the river began to rise at Brisbane."

I smiled cunningly. "Unless I am greatly mistaken, Mrs. Pagett," I hazarded, "some one smoking his pipe in the Gardens shared that information with you ten minutes later."

My charming hostess blushed. "It got us on the married strength of the Plymouth Division," she said simply, as her husband entered the room.

"Mary, my dear——" he began.

"There!" I exclaimed triumphantly, "I was right after all. The name of the beautiful inspiration that came to you that moonlight night in the Brisbane Botanical Gardens, Mr. Pagett, was *not* Nicotine."

"Who said it was?" retorted Mr. Pagett, with a rudeness that betrayed his discomfiture.



## THE COCOA VALVE



## THE COCOA VALVE

**H**ORATIO OLIVER HAMPDEN was the only son of his mother, and she was a widow. His father, who had stepped out of the din of Tel-el-Kebir into the Everlasting Silence, had found little leisure in the course of many years' foreign service for the accumulation of riches. It was, in point of fact, only by the exercise of great self-denial that the widow was able to scrape together a sum sufficient for the lad's simple outfit. Horatio himself was about as happy in a gun-room as a nun would be among the ladies of the ballet. Though deemed physically fit to wield a pen in the service of Her Majesty, he was handicapped, to start with, by constitutional weakness. He was, moreover, hyper-sensitive, and disposed to take life terribly in earnest—neither of which idiosyncrasies commended themselves to the Young Gentlemen, his messmates. He could not even sell them letters from sister or female cousin, for the simple reason that he possessed neither relative. This is a sin of omission that no right-minded Young Gentle-

man can be expected to tolerate for an instant. But when, on the other hand, a fellow is addicted to writing home to his mother at great length and by each mail, and no remittances result therefrom, who can wonder at any assembly of Young Gentlemen regarding such conduct as a sign of incipient madness?

Now, when a youth of this calibre is suddenly pitchforked into a hot-bed of sucking Nelsons, trouble is pretty sure to ensue. Trouble *did* ensue—as you shall presently hear—in Horatio Oliver Hampden's case.

One morning, soon after his arrival on the station, the Exigencies of the Service (*alias* the Head of his Department) demanded Horatio's dispatch on board the flagship in quest of certain information. For diplomatic reasons we had been engaged for some days past in "showing the flag" to the truculent and *décolleté* heathen of certain jungle-covered islands; and although, as far as we could see, our little comedy had been played to empty houses, so to speak, it was with the proud consciousness of a service rendered to the State that we had at length sought the tranquillity of Hell Bay. The thermometer lived up to the name of the locality by refusing to register—even at night—anything less than three figures; while, with the first glimmer of dawn, it rose like the lark. Occasionally Death would touch some sailor's brain with his red-hot forefinger; and the carpenter's crew would be kept busy for an hour or two with saw, and hammer, and brass-headed nails. Yet men may come and men may go, but routine goes on for ever; and so it came to pass that, at ten of the clock in the fore-noon watch,

Horatio Oliver Hampden went on board the flagship in Hell Bay.

While the required information was being hunted up in the Admiral's office, Horatio was invited to step below and wait in the gunroom. In less than a brace of shakes—in speaking of the strange children it is as well to adopt their method of computing time—the flagship's Young Gentlemen had recognised in him a Samson of innocence delivered by a wise Providence into their Philistine hands.

When, therefore, a small box or cupboard upon the after bulkhead had excited his curiosity sufficiently to induce him to ask its meaning, the Senior Snotty (sometimes known as Midshipman), seeing the opportunity, was prompt to take advantage of it.

"Do you mean to tell me," he inquired with well-feigned surprise, "that your own gunroom isn't fitted with one? Well, damn my eyes! Surely this is some strange oversight on the part of the Admiralty. Unless you had told me so, I couldn't have believed it possible that there existed in the Service a gunroom without a cocoa valve!"

"Without a how much?" ejaculated the mystified Clerk.

"A cocoa valve, I believe I said," repeated the Snotty, with an elaborate assumption of politeness; "and when I say a cocoa valve, I mean a—well, I mean a cocoa valve."

What he really did mean no one knew less than the Senior Snotty himself. Nevertheless it was an obvious waste of opportunity to tell this *ingenuus puer*



the prosaic truth, viz. that the queer little box was simply an ornamental casing protecting one of the numerous mitre wheels connected with the pumping machinery of the ship.

Horatio, sitting in the glare of the 'midship scuttle, blinked at this *blasé* Officer of eighteen summers, who sprawled upon the opposite locker.

"I am afraid I am very ignorant," he said timidly, "but would you mind explaining to me what a cocoa valve is?"

The stare with which the Senior Snotty regarded Horatio was intended to suggest the compassion of superior knowledge for dense ignorance. The student of physiognomy, however, might have detected therein the symptoms of a brain in the throes of invention. "I am surprised, not to say grieved," he began slowly, his idea being yet unmatured, "at meeting in the Service one so ill-informed on the latest Admiralty scheme for the comfort of junior Officers. Why, God bless my soul!" he shouted, jumping up as the idea struck him; "look here!"

Throwing open the little door of the casing, he disclosed a cocoa-stained cup and saucer, which he himself had used in the morning watch, and which a lazy steward had providentially hidden there, when the gunroom was "cleared up for the rounds."

Horatio, to the general satisfaction of the Young Gentlemen, seemed impressed by this opportune discovery. "How very convenient!" he exclaimed delightedly; "but, do you know, I don't think I quite understand how the thing works."

"Oh! like all really great inventions," returned the other affably, pleased at the result of his "draw," "it's simple enough when you know how. These pipes, you see, communicate with a cocoa copper in the cook's galley for'ard. A trifling monthly subscription from the mess to the cook's mate ensures the copper being kept filled. Hence, should a Johnnie yearn for a drink of the grateful and comforting at any hour of the day or night, all he has to do is to bring his cup to this cocoa valve, and turn the mitre wheel!"

Horatio Oliver was charmed. To think that, amid such a heterogeneous mass of voice tubes and electric wires, ventilators and steam pipes, a paternal Admiralty should find means and space for running unlimited cocoa from the cook's galley straight into the Young Gentlemen's mouths, as it were, almost brought the tears to his eyes. And yet, such is the ingratitude of boyhood, he could call to mind no single instance in which his own messmates had not referred to those kindly gentlemen in terms that positively made him shudder. To be sure, their gunroom lacked the priceless boon of a cocoa valve; but the omission was so clearly an oversight on the part of the Whitehall Board, that it only needed representation on their part to obtain an ever-flowing stream of cocoa also.

Returning to his own mess, with heightened colour and sparkling eyes he told the story of the flagship's cocoa valve. The Young Gentlemen, incredulous at first, quickly waxed indignant at the want of consideration shown them by the Lords Commissioners. It was agreed *nem. con.* that Mr. Hampden, as the

discoverer of the grievance, should be deputed to approach the First Lieutenant with a view to his requesting the Captain to move the Commander-in-Chief to petition the Board of Admiralty to redress it. To Horatio's mind there appeared to be a suspicion of circumlocution about the proposed method of correspondence ; but, as the Junior Snotty pointed out, the grasping spirit of Her Majesty's Stationery Department was the sole bar to an Assistant Clerk communicating directly with the First Sea Lord.

A very brief acquaintance with the Service is sufficient to impress one with the conviction that an interview with a First Lieutenant touching some proposed innovation is wisely deferred till "after working hours." It was not, therefore, until the naval rite known as "evening quarters" had been duly performed that Horatio ventured to broach the subject to the somewhat choleric Number One. His patience—he had been bursting with the idea now for some five hours—was rewarded by the marked attention with which that usually brusque Officer listened to the recital of the Young Gentlemen's grievance. The detail that the quarter-deck, where the interview took place, was just then singularly devoid of Young Gentlemen must have escaped Number One's notice ; at all events he refrained from commenting thereon.

"It's nothing less than a public scandal," he exclaimed, "that twenty hardworking young Officers should in these progressive days be denied the privilege of a cocoa valve ! For my part, I certainly

had no idea of its non-existence in your mess ; my only wonder is that the gunroom have not agitated about it long ago."

"Until I made the discovery in the flagship's gunroom this morning, sir," stammered Horatio, blushing at the thought of his 'cuteness, "I don't think they had ever heard of a cocoa valve before."

"Then they ought to regard you as a public benefactor, Mr. Hampden. Yes, I will certainly represent the case to the Captain ; but it would simplify matters considerably if I had a plan or specification of a cocoa valve to show him. Do you think—with the Carpenter's help, for instance—you could manage something of the kind yourself?"

Horatio had no doubt whatever about his ability to explain a cocoa valve pictorially. He would as readily have undertaken an illustrated treatise on the parallel lines in Mars, or a definition of the Marine Officer's position afloat ; for, as I have before observed, he was prone to dwell unduly on the seamy questions of life.

That evening a gunboat left the squadron with mails for Singapore ; and with them went a glowing account from Horatio to his mother in England of the cocoa valve incident, and of the kudos he had obtained therefrom among his brother Officers. Of the pathos of that letter, viewed in the light of subsequent events, I can speak with authority ; since, long afterwards at home, I had the privilege of reading it myself.

All through the maddening purgatory of the

sweltering tropic night the lad watched in his restless slumber the revolving of myriad mitre wheels and the twisting in every direction of interminable cocoa pipes. In the morning it was obvious that he was suffering from a touch of the sun. Yet he was a game youngster, despite his constitutional weakness; and, sick as he felt, he resolved that nothing should induce him to go on the list until the cocoa valve specification was completed. All day long in his spare time he laboured at it; and when, late in the afternoon at the Senior Snotty's invitation, I looked in at the gunroom for a whisky cocktail, I found him, with the Carpenter at his elbow, still poring over the big drawing-board.

Mr. Mortice winked at me as I entered. "I've just been suggestin' to Mr. 'Ampden, sir," he said, "that we cut 'oles in one of the ship's main boilers and lay pipes from them to the cocoa copper in the galley. By this means, you see, the cocoa will always be kep' 'ot at night after the galley fire is out."

The Senior Snotty sniggered, and promptly cuffed a Cadet for doing the same.

"Yes, I see that, of course, Mr. Mortice," observed Horatio wearily, "and a very clever idea it is. But I don't quite follow your second suggestion—I mean the proposal to run steam pipes from the engine-room condensers into the cocoa copper."

"Well!" remarked the Carpenter, hastily emptying the glass of grog by his side, "I should have thought a young gentleman of your mechanical turn of mind would have spotted the idea at once. Why, don't

you see that a pressure of steam in the copper would ensure such a much quicker flow of cocoa through the pipes? And then——”

Several Young Gentlemen at this juncture hastily quitting the gunroom, I seized the opportunity to make my exit also. Then I entered a feeble protest against the cruelty of the thing. “You fellows ought to be ashamed of yourselves,” I exclaimed severely, struggling with my inclination to laugh; “can’t you see there’ll be the devil to pay when he discovers what a thundering fool you’ve made of him?”

“Oh! Lord,” returned the Junior Snotty, holding his sides, “you should have seen old Mortice’s face, sir, when he was asked the length of pipe necessary to run cocoa from the galley to the gunroom! ‘Good Gawd in ‘eaven, Mr. ‘Ampden,’ he said, ‘is this the blanky first of April, or ham I in Yarmouth lunatic asylum? Let me cool my ‘ead against that stanchion and think it out!’ If half-a-dozen of us hadn’t kicked his shins under the table at the same moment, he would have queered the whole show.”

“You’ll be sorry yet that he didn’t,” I retorted; “and, if there’s trouble over this tommy-rot, you won’t get any sympathy from me, I can tell you!” Nevertheless I made haste to get into the wardroom, lest my speech should bewray me.

Half-an-hour later Horatio Oliver arrived in the First Lieutenant’s cabin under the poop with a roll of paper the size of a young tablecloth. “I’ve finished the plan, sir,” he exclaimed triumphantly, “and I venture to think that we have knocked the flagship’s

cocoa valve into a cocked hat. The idea of utilising heat and steam from the engine-room and stokehold evidently never occurred to the original inventor of the scheme!"

Very gravely Number One carried the precious document into the Captain's cabin, while Horatio returned below. At the foot of the ladder, a few minutes later, I happened upon him in a fainting condition—just in time, luckily, to get him into the wardroom and give him a glass of brandy. It was an imperative and simple enough action; yet nothing that I have done in the whole course of my life gives me greater pleasure to recall.

"Thanks, sir," he said, putting down the glass, "that has pulled me together wonderfully. I am afraid, do you know, that I was nearly making a fool of myself outside there—it must have been the sun yesterday morning that has flattened me out like this. I am awfully glad, though, I was able to work out that cocoa valve idea before knocking under. I think I'll go now, if you'll excuse me, and lie down on the gunroom lockers for a bit."

"My dear fellow," I said, "what you ought to do is to get the doctor to put you on the sick list at once."

"To-morrow," he replied wearily; "I will—to-morrow!"

In the fore-cabin above, the Skipper and Number One were bending over the great cocoa valve specification. Neither of them dreamt, of course, how seriously ill the unconscious perpetrator of that huge joke really was; but on the testimony of the sentry,

who surreptitiously observed them through the key-hole, "they well-nigh busted theirselves with larfin'." The *magnum opus*, which had racked for so many hours the stricken brain of its creator, was eventually relegated to the Captain's portfolio of caricatures and comic cuts. These things, however, I learnt later on, when——

An hour or so after dinner the messenger boy popped his head inside the gunroom curtain with the announcement that "the Chif Engineer would like to speak to the Assistant Clurk on the quarter-deck at once." Horatio, still stretched upon the lockers, collected his scattered senses with an effort, and struggled up the after-ladder. Wardroom and gunroom officers, lounging in conversation on their respective sides of the deck beneath the light of the Cross and other southern constellations, turned to watch the climax of the joke that was convulsing the ship from poop to fo'c'sle. Sailors are proverbially a kind-hearted race; therefore it is hardly necessary to state that not a single one of the crowd either understood the lad himself or realised how extremely ill he undoubtedly was.

"I have sent for you, Mr. Hampden," began the Chief suavely, "to inquire whether it is true that you contemplate employing steam power to run cocoa from the galley to the gunroom?"

Horatio trembled with pleasure to think that his invention should have already attracted the notice of a specialist. "Yes, sir," he replied eagerly, "I thought the addition of hot-water pipes and steam would be



such a grand improvement on the flagship's arrangement. You see——"

"Oh! you did, did you? And what the devil do you mean, sir," interrupted the Chief with an access of simulated anger, "by daring to propose that holes should be cut in my boilers and condensers without reference to me? What I want to know is—am I the Chief Engineer of this ship, or are you? Upon my word, I never heard of such a piece of damned impertinence in all my life! To think that—oh!"—here he suddenly burst into uncontrollable laughter—"you and your—what is it you call it again? Cocoa valve—will be the death of some of us yet!"

To Horatio it seemed as if the night itself was full of mocking laughter. What did it all mean? Why this burst of indignation followed by such a general roar of merriment? Ah! suddenly he understood, and his aching head whirled with the reaction. His scheme, on which he had built such hopes in that letter to his mother, was the common jest of the ship; the son of the gallant soldier, who lay in' the Tel-el-Kebir cemetery, would to-morrow be the laughing-stock of the fleet! Oh! why had they been so cruel as to tell him that senseless lie about the box in the flagship's gunroom?

Without saying a word to any one, Horatio Oliver Hampden walked unsteadily across the deck to the hatchway, and quietly went below.

\* \* \* \* \*

The following morning Private John Mullall, my

military attaché, awoke me as usual by the simple method of falling over my bath.

"It's seven bells, sir," he announced huskily, "and we're goin' to fire quarters at eight, and it's goin' to be a thunderin' 'ot day, and—and Mr. 'Ampden's drowneded hissself in the night!"

I sat bolt upright in my bunk. "Mr. Hampden's WHAT?" I shouted.

"Drowneded hissself, sir—leastways," he corrected, "they seem to say as he've walked overboard in his sleep. He's left his chest all shipshape, with only a suit o' pyjammers missin' from his kit: and on the top of his clothes there's a letter for a Mrs. 'Ampden somewheres in England. He turned out of his 'ammick and wrote it in the middle watch: and when the sentry, who seen him doin' it, come back after striking the bell, Mr. 'Ampden 'ad gone. And not a blessed soul," concluded the old soldier, "has sot eyes on him since!"

So the last of the long letters that had been wont to annoy the Young Gentlemen was written—written with shaking hand and throbbing brain in the solitude of the night watches: while, aweary of the gentlemanly circle, the writer had sought peace and quietness upon the great Unaccompanied Way!

Yet, oh! the pity of it! Staring out of the scuttle at the glassy surface of Hell Bay, and thinking many things, I mechanically noted here and there certain familiar specks, triangular in form: and noting—shuddered.



FOR THE CREDIT OF THE SHIP



## FOR THE CREDIT OF THE SHIP

"It is not the greater hardships of the profession, much less the dangers, but its uncertainties and petty vexations, which tell most severely on a high-strung organisation."—MAHAN'S *Life of Nelson*.

WHEN I tell you that the ship was no other than the historic four hundred and sixty-five ton, three hundred and sixty indicated horse-power, second-class screw gunboat *Seaslug*—the fastest of all the "Greased Lightning" class—you will not wonder at the burning desire of her officers to live up to her brilliant reputation and do her credit. It is true that embittered men, whose best years had been frittered away in flagships and first-class cruisers, were wont to sniff scornfully at the mention of her name ; but to the *Seaslug's* officers themselves this conduct was so obviously a case of "sour grapes" that it roused their pity rather than their resentment. We have the word of those five gallant officers and gentlemen for it—and who so likely to know as they?—that their ship was at once the pride of her own squadron and the

terror of half-a-dozen foreign ones. When, however, you ask me on what grounds this splendid prestige rested, I reply that—not being a student of naval history—there you have me.

There were, nevertheless, dark hours (the breakfast hours towards the close of the financial month mainly) when the quintet told themselves in mournful numbers that things are *not* always what they seem. The truth is that more than one skeleton lay hid in the *Seaslug's* lockers; and although the combined pains and penalties of the Articles of War would not have wrung the admission from them, in the privacy of their own wardroom it was an entirely different matter. There was no getting away from the fact, for instance—as the engineer invariably remarked with his second bad egg—that when a composite vessel of the *Seaslug's* antiquity takes to jumping about in a big sea, the odds are in favour of her framework giving way and letting the engines drop through the bottom. As well expect a broad-beamed, middle-aged chaperon, added the engineer—who was cursed with an imagination—to bump round a ball-room without danger to *her* stays and internal machinery! Nor was it to be denied, even by the gunnery lieutenant, that the quarterly firing of Barking Billy, the 'midship 4-inch (and only) gun, was a terrible strain on the *Slug's* anything but iron constitution. Moreover, when, from lack of space, five matutinal tubs full of soapy water have to be removed from the wardroom before the breakfast cloth can be laid, and the coal-scuttle has to be kept

in the cabin nearest the stove for the same reason, one can understand the rooted antipathy of the mess to visitors. Once over the Terror of Europe's gangway, and Ichabod stared you in the face.

But, as the very weakness of woman is not the least of her many charms, so the shortcomings of their ship endeared her the more to her officers. In the matter of the engines, the gun, and the coal-scuttle, indeed, they were accounted as bagatelle; it was at the skipper that they drew the line. For, frail as his vessel was, he himself was a yet frailer: and, of all the skeletons in her lockers, his—metaphorically speaking, for he ran greatly to adipose tissue—was the most obtrusive. On the stalk of the faded rose—to use a final metaphor—Commander Jan Polwhele was a painfully prominent thorn.

Though his seamanship was above criticism, among the refined and scientific officers of the latter-day Navy Jan was the round man wedged in the square hole. "Shaggy" is the adjective that best describes his general appearance, and his crinkled collar stuck out beneath his peaked beard like an Elizabethan ruff. Indeed, it was popularly supposed that in a previous existence he had sailed with Drake and Salvation Yeo at the heels of the Spanish Armada. Although in cases of grave emergency—such as the shoving off of a boat with a fender hanging over her bows—he could speak at great length and with burning eloquence, yet ordinarily he was the most reticent of men. He had one Story, however, which he invariably related on his own and each of his



officers' birthnights, and the salient features of which were the Red Sea, the ladies' cabin in a troopship, and a looking-glass. There was a Rabelaisian quaintness about it which ensured its favourable reception by the mess, even after it had worn threadbare; but, as no respectable publisher would dream of printing it, I must perforce leave the details to your imagination.

Now, to give the Devil his due, Jan was as proud of the *Slug's* reputation as the wardroom quintet itself—nay, he had often been heard to declare that, were it possible to enhance that reputation by the deed, he would not hesitate to murder and sell his own grandmother for the price of her aged skin. There was one sacrifice alone which—and here lay the rift within the lute—he resolutely refused to make; and that was to enter society. In vain did his officers urge upon him the necessity for observing those social duties which devolve upon the captain of a British man-of-war. He would see them—officers and social duties alike—damned, he very improperly retorted, before he would so much as peep through the chink of a drawing-room door. Nevertheless, as the constant drip of water will sooner or later bore through a block of Cornish granite, so the resolution of this tough west-country seaman was in the end worn down by the importunity of his subordinates.

Under pretence of defects, the *Slug* had crawled in from a dreary exile beyond the pale of civilisation to that hub of the station from which the ever-

circling cruisers radiate. Then the quintet of officers, stimulated by a mental picture of the wardroom mirror stuck full of invitation cards, redoubled their efforts; and the harassed Jan so far weakened as to consent to write his name in the visitors' book at Government House.

The doctor and engineer were thereupon chosen by throw of dice to escort their captain to his Excellency's that same afternoon—on the principle of striking while the iron is hot; and this duty they so conscientiously performed, that they stuck to Jan like limpets to a sea-worn pile until his signature lay wet upon the fashionable page.

When, in due season, this little seed bore fruit in the form of an invitation to dinner, the language that broke forth from the captain's cabin was appalling. With one accord the first lieutenant, navigator, and paymaster, who were in the wardroom, hurriedly arose and sought the asylum of their own apartments; while the doctor and engineer, recalling their more active agency in the matter, hastened to the remoter sanctuaries of the sick bay and screw alley respectively. Not until the day was far spent and the homicidal yearnings of their commander somewhat abated did the guilty five feel justified in adventuring themselves forth from their retirement. Their first step on foregathering in the wardroom was to ask him to dinner that evening—partly as a conciliatory measure, and partly to breathe him by a preliminary canter for the bigger event. This invitation the mollified Jan was graciously pleased to accept; and

the question of her Drawing-room frock was never more burningly discussed by a *débutante* and her friends than was the topic of Jan's dinner-dress round the gunboat's wardroom table that night.

For—let me whisper the truth at once—the commanding officer of Europe's Terror had not a single decent rag to his back! In scantiness his kit resembled a Pacific islander's, which, as every one knows, consists of three plantain leaves—one in his bag, one at the wash, and one on ; while the little he did possess should have been discharged as time-expired years before. It was evident that to be a *persona grata* at Government House one must at least dress for dinner when bidden thither, and for the credit of the ship the officers resolved to see that her captain did so in the orthodox manner.

Waking very betimes on the dreaded day with a sinking sensation at the pit of his stomach, Jan prescribed for himself a stiff whisky and soda. A cocktail followed the prescription ere ever the sun showed over the *Slug's* foreyard, and the natural reaction at lunch-time was met with a pint of bubbly wine. The afternoon hours were picked out with brandies, so to speak, like diamond points on a watch-dial, and by the time the anxious quintet arrived to superintend his toilet, Jan had so far succeeded in shaking off his reticence as to have the appearance of speaking with many tongues.

Then began the adorning of Commander Jan Polwhele, R.N., for his Excellency the Governor's dinner-party ; and for the credit of the ship each of

the quintet had brought along with him a portion of his own wardrobe, for Jan's would have been rejected with scorn by an Adelphi drama sandwichman.

After a desperate five minutes' encounter with one of the paymaster's highly-starched shirts, he took on single-handed the doctor's gold-laced trousers, which defeated him utterly. It was only by the united efforts of the five perspiring officers, equipped with trouser-stretchers, shoe-horns, button-hooks, and other sartorial instruments, that he got into them at all ; and then it was discovered that the new shirt had been so crumpled by the operation as to necessitate its being peeled off his suffering body and replaced by one of the first lieutenant's. While the latter garment was being fetched, the engineer dried the moist martyr with cotton waste from the engine-room ; and finally, at imminent risk of manslaughter, and in a withering fire of invective, the navigator succeeded in buttoning one of his No. 16 collars round the bull neck of his commanding officer. Then the few deft finishing touches were added, and Jan, scarce daring to breathe for fear of bursting something, stood limply in the middle of the circle, as though he were a performing orang-outang at a circus. Behind him, like a keeper, stood Private Logan, of the Royal Marines—"the captain's valley," as he styled himself, who, although he had not moved a hand's turn in effecting it, now plainly assumed all credit for the result.

\* \* \* \* \*

Well into the small hours of the morning sat the wardroom mess, planning social triumphs for many a

week to come, and impatiently awaiting Jan's return. But ere he arrived, a signal was brought to the first lieutenant upon a slate by the barefooted signalman of the watch. Had the man been Azrael himself, or the slate one of "Barking Billy's" live shells dropped in their midst through the skylight, the effect could not have been more paralysing. With Service laconism the *Seaslug* was bidden to sail at daybreak for those dismal isles beyond the pale of civilisation whence she was newly come !

At three o'clock, having spent the last four hours and a half at the club, Jan came over the side. His reticence had returned to him in a tenfold degree, and upon his face was a smile of great fixity, which not even the crushing news of the signal had power to relax. "Eashtern Question goin' to be sholved by *Sheaslug*," he confidently opined, as they hoisted him limb by limb into his bunk, and thereupon fell asleep. So potent a charm against insomnia is a mind conscious of rectitude !

\* \* \* \* \*

On the first day of the *Slug's* return to the islands beyond the pale, the officers of three small gunboats belonging to three Great Powers came on board to welcome back their dear brothers, and pledge eternal friendship in Collier's sweetest bubbly wine. Plainly, therefore, the Eastern Question was not the cause of the Terror of Europe's flitting. The heart-broken quintet in her wardroom were utterly at a loss to account for the Vice-Admiral's brutal conduct ; imaginary grievances of happier days grew into stern

realities to be brooded over ; and the little matter of the engines, the gun, and the coal-scuttle was no longer accounted as bagatelle.

It was just a month after this that one of the six birthday festivals—the engineer's—came round again ; and the skipper, in accordance with the traditions of the ship, dined in the wardroom. Equally in accordance with those traditions he told the Story—with all its vivid local colour of Red Sea, ladies' cabin, and looking-glass.

The seven seafarers—the sentry was also listening through the skylight—gave way to paroxysms of mirth ; and certainly it was a most humorous and evergreen tale.

Jan himself was the first to recover speech.

“Yes,” he mused, leaning back in his chair, “it's devilish funny, isn't it? The last time I told it was at his Excellency the Governor's din——”

Instantly every spark of hilarity died out of the five faces round him, and even the sentry's grin twisted itself into a look of disapproval. Dawning enlightenment mingled with a lust for blood was the predominant expression now.

Presently the first lieutenant spoke with icy distinctness. “Do you really mean to say,” he inquired, “that you told—THAT STORY before her Excellency and the ladies?”

“To say nothing of the Governor, the Bishop, the General, and the Vice-Admiral?” added the navigator bitterly.

Jan could not deny it.

"I hope to goodness," gasped the doctor, after a deadly pause, "that you had the gumption, anyway, to skip that part about the——?"

"And the——!" sighed the paymaster.

"And, above all, the——" said the engineer hysterically.

No. Jan, it appeared, had never told the story with a greater regard for details than he did that night. "Indeed," he concluded thoughtfully, "I remembered it so particularly well that—between ourselves—I fear I must have been a trifle tiddley."

A trifle tiddley, forsooth! The whole thing was as plain as a pikestaff now. The Vice-Admiral was in no mind to suffer a second public recital of Jan's troopship reminiscences. Wherefore Jan and his officers—who were doubtless as bad as their captain—were hustled out of polite earshot to the back of beyond for "the credit of the ship."

## THE SHADOW OF DEATH





## THE SHADOW OF DEATH

“The apparatus never lies!”—*The Octoroon.*

THERE died quite recently with great suddenness on a foreign station a certain British naval officer.

In pondering the swift and easy manner of this player's exit from our stage, one is led to desire for oneself—despite the weekly litany against sudden death—an equally undemonstrative and simple end. One warm, fragrant, moonlit middle watch in a southern harbour, he had been observed comfortably lounging with book and pipe across the big stern gun. At the calling of the morning watch he was still there—the book gripped fast in his cold fingers, the pipe tight clenched between his teeth. Yet the fire in pipe-bowl and human clay alike had burned itself out, and the man's life had slipped away into the infinite as noiselessly as the wreathing smoke. Which incontestable fact being at length grudgingly accepted by the living, they stretched their dead shipmate decently

upon the deck ; and presently one came and spread above him the crimson cross of his country's flag.

Now, the deceased officer had strengthened Nature's gifts of an iron constitution and robust frame by leading the most active and temperate of lives. Up to the very hour of his death he had, in consequence, ever enjoyed rude health. Small wonder, then, that the ship's surgeons should be utterly at a loss to account for the premature passing of so proper a man. The body was landed, and, after a *post-mortem* examination, an inquest was held upon it. But, the doctors having failed to discover sufficient indication of the cause of death, the coroner's jury played for safety with a verdict of "by the visitation of God." A stereotyped, hackneyed, old-time phrase of crowner's quest law, forsooth ! Yet, having meditated on what follows, you will presently agree with me that they could not well have chosen a more singularly fitting one.

The tinge of mystery in the case caused it to be reported pretty generally throughout the press ; and many, therefore, who chance upon this brief recapitulation of it, will readily gather to whom it refers. Nevertheless, of so recent a date is the mournful occurrence, and so fantastic the phenomenon with which I am about to associate the dead officer's memory, that I feel it would be unseemly at present to set down aught on my part that might tend to his identification. Indeed, the startling and improbable character of the thing I saw—and again did not see—prompts me, even as I write, to altogether stay my hand. Whispered at midnight over the dying embers of a

Christmas fire, or among the jungle shadows cast by a tropical moon, one might look to convey to others something of that conviction felt by oneself. But, told through the colourless medium of ink and paper, it is otherwise; and the sacredness of a promise to him who is many days' journey set out upon the Silent Way alone impels me to continue.

\* \* \* \* \*

"This latest discovery," observed the torpedo lieutenant authoritatively, "ought to give a leg-up to psychical research."

Ever since the arrival of the last mail from home, the conversation at the wardroom dinner-table had turned, for the most part, on the new photography.

For three sultry years had these gallant sailors, soldiers, doctors, accountants, engineers and professors practised their several callings in the same little tumbling, cockroach-crawling, iron-bound city. For a thousand odd nights they had aired the same grievances, told the same chestnuts, argued the same questions, quarrelled and made it up with the same monotonous regularity, till the discovery that there was at least one new thing under the sun came upon them with a sort of shock. In the discussion of this latest achievement of science the happy family met on common ground.

"I'll be hanged," said the staff-surgeon, in reply to the torpedoist's remark, "if I can see why it should! You may photograph a living man's skeleton, certainly, but even the new photography draws the line at his spirit!"

"So it may—at present," retorted the torpedo lieutenant eagerly; "but—who knows? This photography of the invisible is only in its infancy as yet; and a few weeks ago you would have ridiculed what is now an accomplished fact."

The staff-surgeon leaned back in his chair, while a waiter brushed the crumbs from the table-cloth before him. "Because the Rontgen rays have laid bare for us the hitherto invisible," he returned, when the man had passed on, "that is no reason why they should be expected to provide us with pictures of the non-existent."

"I trust, doctor," observed the chaplain solemnly from across the table, "that you do not deny the existence of the soul?"

"I cannot conceive a photograph of it, your reverence," replied the other warily.

"Can you conceive a photograph of a ghost, doctor?" asked the chief engineer.

"As I don't believe in the existence of ghosts themselves, I certainly cannot. No, the new photography may do much for scientific research, but you may take your oath it will never get a snapshot at a ghost!"

"And yet the old photography is continually doing something very like it."

"There are more things in heaven and earth, Horatio, than are dreamt of in your photography," murmured the subaltern of Marines softly.

"And what is the old photography doing, chief?" asked the staff-surgeon, loftily ignoring the flippant interruption.

"Surely you must have heard—anyhow, it's a pretty well known fact—that, whenever certain persons are photographed, a second dim and shadowy image invariably appears alongside their own upon the negative."

The staff-surgeon laughed softly. "I believe it is a fact," he observed, "that whenever certain persons are having a tooth out—or their photograph taken—they can't sit still."

"My dear sir, I'm not talking of a blurred photo: I mean a second distinct shadow or shape—entirely different from that of the sitter."

"The chief is quite right," chimed in the commander from his end of the table; "I have met with one of those very cases myself. There is a retired colonel in my part of the world, who is slowly worrying himself to death about it. In his case the phenomenon takes the undeniable form of a young woman."

"I don't see where the need for worry comes in, sir," laughed the torpedo lieutenant; "if I were in the colonel's shoes I should be tempted to squander my substance in riotous sitting!"

"If you were in the shoes of a respectable married man whose wife is—not a young woman," returned his senior, "I think you would avoid a photographer like the devil. You should see the chilling smile with which she receives the poor wretch's protestations of innocence! 'My love,' is her invariable retort, '*cui bono?* The camera cannot lie!'"

"For these and all other mercies," said the chaplain,

standing up in response to the presidential hammer, "thank God."

After the grace there was a moment's pause in the conversation, every one being busy with his own thoughts. The wine was placed on the table, and the president mechanically pushed the decanters towards his left-hand neighbour.

"Did you yourself ever see one of those photographs of the haunted colonel?" I presently asked the commander. I have the misfortune to be that naval *bête noir*, "a bit of a sea-lawyer."

"No," he returned shortly, "I never did. My friend is a peculiarly sensitive man, and—from fear of ridicule—can rarely be persuaded to show them to any one. Nevertheless I regard his word as unimpeachable."

"Naturally," I observed, passing the wine. "The colonel states in perfect good faith that, whenever his proofs are sent home from the photographer's, he finds them marred by the shadow of a mysterious young woman. I once knew a man who never went outside barracks for six weeks, because he saw lions sitting in the gateway. No; I am afraid that nothing short of actually seeing one of those ghost photographs myself will ever convince me that they exist."

"Scepticism is all very well in its way," began the commander hotly, when the president again tapped the table with his hammer.

"Mr. Vice, 'the Queen!'"

"Gentlemen, 'the Queen'—God bless her!"

Up to this point the vice-president, a quiet, thoughtful man, had taken no part in the discussion ; but now he turned towards me.

" Her Majesty's health having been drunk," he said gravely, " I am open to lay a wager. I will bet you an even fiver that you will be convinced before you turn in to-night."

" Done!" said I ; and the conversation drifted into other channels.

\* \* \* \* \*

Three hours later I was in my cabin beginning to undress, when there came a tap upon the doorpost, and the curtain was partly drawn aside.

" By Jove!" I exclaimed, looking up ; " I'd forgotten all about that bet!"

" I hadn't," he returned quietly. " Come across to my caboose, soldier ; I've something to show you."

It was past eleven, and every one but our two selves, the watch on deck, and the sentries, had turned in. The night was oppressively hot, and from hammocks in the flats below and cabins round the aft deck came the nasal chorus of worn-out Jack and his master. The feverish throbbing of the dynamo down in the citadel suggested the idea that the heart of the great ship herself was affected by the heat ; and a rat, scuttling out of the captain's pantry as we crossed the deck, looked insufferably warm, poor devil ! in his black fur jacket.

Carefully closing the door of his cabin and switching on the light, my companion produced from under his bunk a case full of photographic plates. His face



was white and drawn—with the heat, I supposed; but the extreme gravity of his manner struck me as bordering on the ludicrous. I have changed my opinion since.

"You said at dinner," he began, with a nervous catch in his voice, "that you would only believe in these—what shall I call them?—haunted photographs, when you actually saw one with your own eyes."

I nodded. Truth to tell I was beginning by this time to feel a bit jumpy myself.

He took a plate from the case, and held it between his finger and thumb before the incandescent light.

"Tell me what you see," he whispered hoarsely, watching my face anxiously the while.

His hand shook so dreadfully, it was impossible to see anything—and I told him so.

"Here—hang on to it yourself, for God's sake!" he exclaimed irritably, "while I take the shade off the light."

Holding the plate steady before the electric glare, I saw—what? At first, merely a negative picture of my companion in flannels, with pipe in mouth and novel in hand, sprawling lazily upon a garden seat somewhere at home. A picture suggestive of merry England, of sunshine and flowers, of dainty women in their summer draperies, of beauty, warmth, and contentment. Yet, in spite of it all—in spite, also, of the stifling heat of the cabin, I felt unaccountably chilled. My nerves, too, seemed all endways; and the sentry

suddenly striking seven bells overhead, nearly startled me into dropping the glass.

"Great Scott, man! can't you speak? Say something, for heaven's sake!"

Examining the negative more closely, I became aware of a large defect or blur across the elm trunk behind the seat. Had it not been that the evident position of the sun made it impossible, I should have judged it to be the shadow cast by some invisible person or object. Yes, a shadow certainly—now I came to look into it, the shadow of a stooping form; and yet—

"For God's sake, man! what do you think it is?"

"It is difficult to say from a negative," I answered, with a jauntiness I did not feel: "but if you have printed off any——"

"It wouldn't help you in the least if I had," he broke in. "I don't know how it is in other cases—in the commander's case of the colonel, for instance—but in mine the shadow never prints off upon the paper." •

"Then the phenomenon is easily explained," I cried, with a sigh of relief. "The film on the negative has been accidentally rubbed or scraped in that spot since you last printed from it."

For answer he lifted at random another plate from the box, and held it before the light. It showed a group of officers upon the quarter-deck; yet, almost before I had singled out the figure of my companion, I marked beside it that dim, mysterious, bending shape. One by one I examined the remaining plates

in the box. They showed me my messmate in various guises—amid the accessories of the photographer's studio, on the terrace with the wedding group, in the centre of the merry picnic party, in the front rank of the amateur burlesque company—but in each case overhung by the same shadowy uncanniness.

"You see," he said wistfully, as though hoping for contradiction, "the negatives couldn't have been accidentally rubbed in that peculiar way in every instance, could they? In the groups, too, the mark is invariably next to me."

"No," I admitted reluctantly, "it is a shadow right enough."

"But whose shadow, in God's name?" he demanded passionately—"the shadow of what? I will tell you, soldier"—his voice fell to a whisper, and he nervously plucked at my sleeve—"it is the *shadow of death!*"

My first impression, as I started backwards, was that the heat or some other cause had unhinged his mind. He was quick to divine my thought.

"My dear fellow," he said, with a faint smile, "I am as sane as you are—though, heaven knows! the worry of this thing has been enough to turn the strongest brain. Surely mortal man never had a clearer warning to 'stand by' than I have!"

I tried—in a half-hearted way, I fear—to laugh at his foreboding, and to make light of the whole affair. "Anyhow," I said, "your shadow has won you a fiver, bad luck to it!"

"I was betting on a certainty," he replied, "for no sane man could reject the evidence of those negatives.

You know how keen I am on psychical research," he continued, replacing the shade over the light; "well, you mark my words, soldier, we are on the threshold of a startling discovery! More than one truism was uttered at dinner to-night. There *are* more things in heaven and earth than are dreamt of in our philosophy—and the Röntgen rays are going to light us to one or two of them. The new photography *will* give a leg-up to psychical research—and, with your help, I shall be the humble means of indicating one of the directions in which that research may be made."

"With my help?"

"Yes. You dabble in photography yourself. Well, I want you to add the one negative necessary to complete this set."

The proposition startled me not a little.

"When?" I asked.

"After my death," he answered solemnly—"as soon afterwards as possible. The shadow, as you have seen, grows more pronounced on each succeeding negative. Perhaps—who knows?—a photograph of my dead body may hold the key to the entire phenomenon. At all events the experiment is worth trying. You might then send the set of plates home, with a short account of the whole business, for publication. The fiver," he added maliciously, "should cover all expenses. Will you promise?"

"Rot!" I exclaimed. "Why, a strong, healthy fellow like you will live to be——"

"Promise!" he insisted: "come, shake hands on it."

So I promised; and presently sought my own

bunk, where I tossed in clammy sleeplessness till dawn.

A bare month later there died with great suddenness on a foreign station a certain British naval officer.

\* \* \* \* \*

Mindful of my promise, I sought out the skipper; and, laying before him all that is here set down, gained his sanction to the making of the *post-mortem* picture. A canvas screen, that had been reverently rigged about the body, toned the strong morning light to an admirable softness: and, turning back the crimson and white folds of the ensign, I speedily obtained what promised to be a successful portrait of the dead sailor.

That night, long after the last volleys had been fired and he had vanished from our ken for ever, I sat in a darkened spare cabin, fearsomely developing the photograph of the morning! As I watched the action of the chemicals upon the negative in the dull glow of the ruby lamp, I scarcely know what awful thing I expected to see. The more distinct the solemn picture on the glass became, the more my fingers trembled; and yet, in the end I found no cause for disquietude at all! Were this an attempt at sensational fiction, here indeed would have been my opportunity for effect! But, being what it is, a plain soldier's account of an actual, though inexplicable phenomenon, the truth, however disappointing, must needs be the chief consideration. Clear and well defined against its background of stretched canvas appeared the rigid, recumbent figure: but of that previous ghostly attend-

ant not a vestige now was to be seen. When the day dawns, the shadows flee away.

I have fulfilled my promise: I have set down, as well as in me lies, an exact account of this strange thing that befell. To others more cunning in the occult sciences I leave the interpretation thereof, reminding them that the phenomenon of which I speak is no creation of the story-maker's brain. For many a man, who thinks to stand alone before the camera, finds presently in the picture a phantom shape beside him.

Who knows? Chancing, in the course of his researches, upon a wormhole in the Ancient's door, the dead and gone psychologist may have peeped imprudently upon the Inmate, as he sat a-sharpening his scythe. Then the shadow of the Outraged One fell upon him for a season, undetected by all save the hawk-eyed camera: till suddenly the avenging scythe whistled and flashed, and the shadow flitted elsewhere.

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*H.M.S. Camperdown,  
Mediterranean, March 1899.*







